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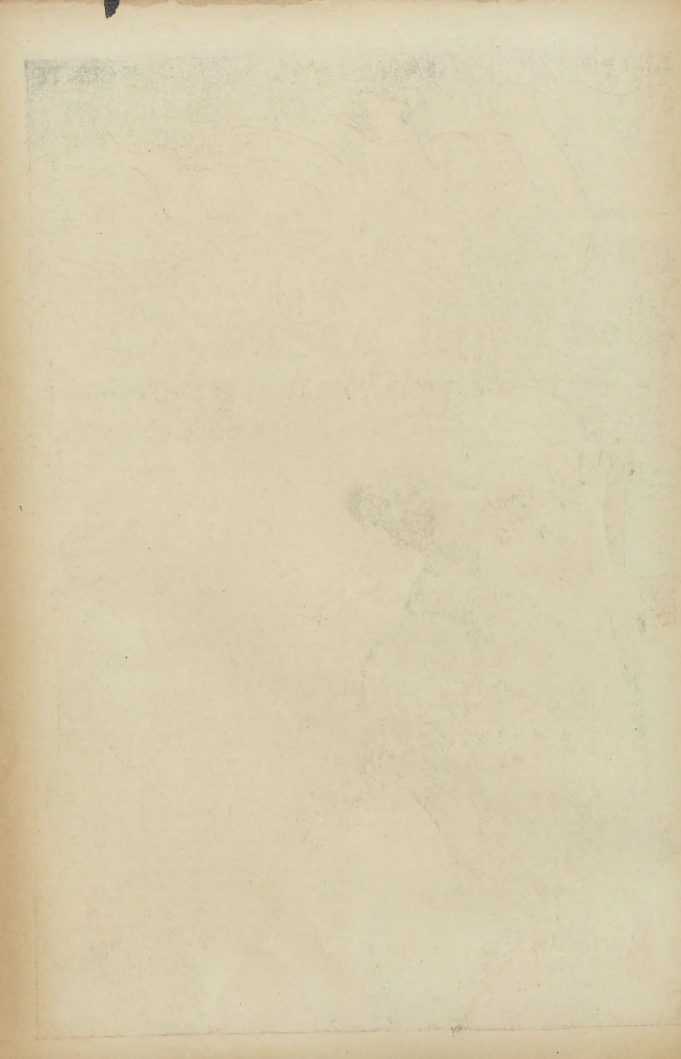
JAN. 9, 1915

5 CENTS

Nick Carter Stories

THE SUICIDE
—OR—
Nick Carter and
the Lost Head





NICK CARTER STORIES

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No. 122.

NEW YORK, January 9, 1915.

Price Five Cents.

THE SUICIDE;

Or, NICK CARTER AND THE LOST HEAD.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE END CAME.

"Slow down, Danny, and look out for that wire," said Nick Carter to his chauffeur. "It may be a live one."

"I'm onto it, chief."

"Onto it, eh? Don't you run onto it while I'm in the car, not if it's a live one. You may fancy absorbing the output of an electric-lighting plant, but not for mine, Danny, not for mine! I know what it would do to me. I've seen men electrocuted."

Danny Maloney laughed, for it was obvious that the famous detective was jesting.

"Onto it with my lamps, chief, is what I meant," he replied.

"Say what you mean, then," said Nick, with a smile. "Precision is one of the valuable assets of a detective. Luckily, however, you are addressing one who can read between the lines—barring those of the ambiguous letter that brought us out here."

"Can't you fathom it? It must be mighty blind, chief, if it fools you."

"On the contrary, Danny, it is perfectly plain—what there is of it," said Nick dryly. "A woman, one Mrs. Myra Darling, states that she is in great trouble, that a very devoted friend of mine has advised her to appeal to me, and will I favor her with a call at my earliest convenience."

"That all?" questioned Danny tersely.

"The whole business," said Nick. "Of course, the appeal coming from a woman, I cannot turn it down. Noblesse oblige."

"You don't know her?"

"Not from a side of leather. I am acquainted with no Darling woman—suppress that smile, Danny. I know

what you are thinking. But all women are not darlings—far from it."

"This one might be," said Danny, his smile spreading to a grin.

"That's neither here nor there," said Nick, with a laugh. "Not being in the market, Danny, all women look alike to me. Now, the said Mrs. Darling's trouble may be—ah, but we are near an answer to the momentous question. Yonder is the place, unless I am much mistaken. Stop at the driveway gate. I'll walk into the grounds. Keep your eye peeled, by the way, while I'm engaged with her ladyship."

The place referred to was out beyond Washington Heights and overlooking the Hudson. It was an attractive estate, without being at all pretentious, as were others in the immediate locality.

The grounds flanked a broad street in which electric lighting was being introduced, and from which the house stood back some thirty yards, with a well-kept lawn and a few shade trees. In the rear were a stable and garage, beyond which the land sloped down sharply toward the river.

Nick did not wait for an answer from his chauffeur. He sprang from the car while speaking, then walked briskly up the driveway and approached the house, quite a large wooden dwelling of the colonial type. Nick mounted the broad front veranda and rang the bell.

It was answered almost immediately by a tall, graceful woman, clad in black, and about thirty years of age. She was of medium complexion, with brown hair and eyes and a finely poised head. Her features were regular, but her face was a strong one, rather than handsome, evincing will power, intellectuality, and a lofty character. She bowed and smiled a bit gravely, saying immediately:

"You are Mr. Carter, I think."

"Yes," said Nick politely.

"I am Mrs. Darling. Walk in, please, and come into the library. I am very glad you could comply so soon with my request. It is very good of you."

"I happened to be at liberty this afternoon," Nick replied, following her into the hall. "I received your letter this morning."

Mrs. Darling conducted him into a prettily furnished library and invited him to be seated. Taking an opposite chair, she then said gravely:

"I will take as little as possible of your valuable time. I will tell you with few and simple words, Mr. Carter, why I have sent for you."

"Cover all of the ground, Mrs. Darling," Nick suggested. "My time just now is at your disposal."

"Thank you," she replied, bowing. "I will in that case begin at the beginning. I was married eight years ago to Mr. Cyrus Darling, a New York tobacco dealer, a man whom I have always supposed had considerable means, though he has never informed me definitely. He owned this place, however, and we have always lived well, and he has provided for me generously."

"Mr. Darling is not living?"

"No. I will explain presently."

"Continue."

"I was nearly twenty years younger than he, Mr. Carter, but our married life was a uniformly happy one, though not as gay and festive as he perhaps would have preferred. I am inclined to be domestic, while he was of a volatile nature, having neither a strong or stable character. I frankly admit, Mr. Carter, that he was subservient to my will and wishes."

"I understand you," said Nick.

"I have no children, and I keep only two servants, from a chauffeur, whom I occasionally employ," Mrs. Darling continued. "My husband's habits were good, as the world goes, and I noticed nothing unusual in his conduct until about three months ago."

"And then?"

"I then thought he appeared strangely reticent, at times very self-absorbed and less frank and affectionate than before. I asked him whether there was anything wrong, but he assured me to the contrary, though he seemed a bit irritated because I questioned him."

"I follow you."

"Later, Mr. Carter, he appeared quite despondent, and I feared that his business troubled him. He said that my fears were groundless, and that his business was never better. He went from bad to worse. He said very little at home, and remained in town evenings much more frequently than in years past, which I attributed to his seeming depression and his desire to find relief in the excitement and diversions of the city."

"Did you occasionally accompany him?" Nick inquired.

"Very seldom. He did not seem inclined to have me do so."

"Was he addicted to drink?"

"Only moderately. I never saw him intoxicated, nor anything like it."

"Proceed."

"About two weeks ago, Mr. Carter, he decided to sell his business, saying that he was sick of it and would try something else. I remonstrated with him, telling him that he was making a mistake, and that it is not easy for a man over fifty to make such changes profitably."

"That is very true, Mrs. Darling."

"It had no effect upon him, however, and he let the business go," she replied, sadly shaking her head. "During the following week he was at home part of each day, but he spent most of the afternoons and evenings in town. On Tuesday, one week ago yesterday, he appeared unusually nervous and depressed. I missed him soon after lunch, and supposed he had gone into town. I had an appointment with my dentist and was absent from two o'clock until nearly six. When I returned home—well, Mr. Carter, the end had come."

"You mean?" questioned Nick gravely.

"My husband had committed suicide—or was the victim of foul play."

"H'm, I see!" Nick drew up in his chair. "Were you in any uncertainty at that time, Mrs. Darling, as to the cause of his death?"

"No, not at that time, Mr. Carter," she quickly informed him. "I know what you have in mind—that I should have called in the police immediately. I did not then, however, nor at any time until yesterday, have even a thought of anything but suicide. The circumstances suggested nothing else."

"What were the circumstances, Mrs. Darling?" Nick inquired. "State them briefly."

"There is very little to tell," she rejoined. "My husband was last seen alive by one of my servants. She saw him going out of the back door of the house and around the stable, and she supposed he was going down to our boathouse, which was on the river bank and out of view from here, owing to the sharp slope of the land."

"I see," said Nick, glancing from the window.

"Soon after, Mr. Carter, the boathouse was seen to be on fire. It contained a motor boat and considerable gasoline, which caused it to burn very rapidly. It was completely destroyed. In the ruins were found the remains of my husband, little more than a charred skeleton, from which the flesh was almost entirely burned."

Mrs. Darling paused to dry her eyes, maintaining with an effort her outward composure. Appreciating her feelings, Nick waited a few moments and then inquired:

"Are you sure, Mrs. Darling, that his death was not due to an accident?"

"Positively," she replied. "To begin with, Mr. Carter, he left this letter on the chiffonier in my bedroom. You may read it."

She took it from the library table while speaking and tendered it to the detective.

Nick read it, the following few lines written with pen and ink.

"MY DEAR MYRA: Forgive me for the step I am going to take. I am driven to it by feelings I cannot describe. I am sick and tired of the whole business—of life itself. I am going to end it. Forgive and forget me."

"CYRUS."

Nick replaced the letter on the table, saying considerably:

"There seems, indeed, to be no reasonable doubt of Mr. Darling's intentions. You recognize the writing, I infer."

"Yes, surely," she replied. "Furthermore, Mr. Carter, there were found in the ruins numerous articles that positively identify my husband's remains. They included the buttons on his garments, which were entirely consumed; also his pocketknife, his false teeth, and a plain

gold ring. His revolver also was found near by, and it is supposed that he shot himself after setting fire to the boathouse, presumably to make sure that his terrible design could not miscarry."

"Who examined the articles and investigated the case?" asked Nick.

"Doctor Lyons, my physician, who is also the coroner."

"A capable man," Nick nodded. "I am acquainted with him. What is his opinion?"

"He thinks it a case of suicide. He could find no evidence of anything else, and is very positive in his opinion."

"Had your husband any money, jewelry, or—"

"He left those in the bedroom, his watch, diamonds, and pocketbook, also his ring of keys," Mrs. Darling interposed. "Only one key was missing from the ring."

"Which one?"

"The key to the boathouse."

Nick did not reply for a few moments. He sat gazing thoughtfully at a figure in the heavy carpet. Superficially viewed, the circumstances stated seemed to admit of only one reasonable theory—that Mr. Cyrus Darling had, indeed, deliberately ended his own life.

"The funeral and burial were last Thursday," Mrs. Darling added, during the brief silence on Nick's part. "Doctor Lyons did not think the case called for any investigations beyond those he personally made, nor did I at that time. He—"

"One moment," said Nick, looking up. "What have you since learned, Mrs. Darling, that occasions your misgivings? Why do you now suspect foul play? That, I think, is the term you used."

"I have two reasons for apprehending something of the kind," she replied. "One relates to my husband's estate. I have learned from his lawyer, who has been assisting me, and in whom I have absolute confidence, that Mr. Darling left no will, that he has recently withdrawn considerable money from the bank, and that his safety-deposit drawer contains only a few securities, worth less than three thousand dollars. From dividends which I know that he has been in the habit of receiving, as well as from our living expenses for several years. I know that he was worth at least a hundred thousand dollars."

"Is your lawyer investigating the matter?"

"I have requested him to do so."

"What is his name?" Nick inquired, taking out his notebook.

"Henry Clayton. He has an office in town."

"I am acquainted with him, also," said Nick, noting the name. "You mentioned a second reason for your misgivings. What is that?"

"One of my servants."

"You mean?"

"I referred in my letter, Mr. Carter, to a very devoted friend of yours, who advised me to appeal to you."

"Yes, I remember," said Nick, wondering. "A devoted friend of mine—one of your servants?"

"I refer to my table girl, who also serves me as a maid. You have, I am very sure, no more grateful and devoted an admirer. I will call her."

Nick bowed and waited, still more deeply puzzled as to the girl's identity.

Mrs. Darling touched a bell on the library table.

Nick glanced again from one of the windows—and discovered another perplexing fact.

His touring car was standing where he had left it, but his chauffeur was missing. Danny Maloney had disappeared.

The quick, light steps of the approaching maid sounded in the hall. Turning in that direction just as she appeared at the open door, Nick beheld—

Nancy Nordeck.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL WHO WAS DOWN.

Suspensions were mingled with Nick Carter's surprise at seeing Nancy Nordeck. They were perfectly natural, too, under the circumstances, and in view of the disclosures to which he had just listened. The presence of a girl with a criminal record in the home of a man whose death was shrouded in mystery, much more of a mystery than Mrs. Darling even imagined, though already keenly appreciated by the detective, might indeed be significant.

Months had passed since Nick last saw Nancy Nordeck. She had so improved in looks that he hardly recognized her. She bore little likeness to the frail girl with pinched and haggard face, who was so deeply affected by the violent death of her crook father that she had resolved to reform, a moral awakening that Nick had by no means felt sure would be lasting.

His first thought, therefore, was that she might be up to her old tricks and in league with rascals to have killed Cyrus Darling to get possession of his fortune. It was not in Nick's nature to expose the girl, nevertheless, if her reformation was genuine, for he never put a block in the way of any one who was down and striving to rise.

He felt for a moment that his position might be a delicate one, but though no signs of them appeared in his face, his impressions evidently were suspected by the girl. For she approached him quickly, saying respectfully, yet with characteristic assurance:

"I know what you're thinking, Mr. Carter, and no one could blame you. But there's nothing in it, sir. I've been as straight as a string from the time you set me right and shook hands with me, wishing me all kinds of good luck, and you couldn't think if you tried how much I now care for you and your good opinion. I have hid nothing here, sir. Mrs. Darling knows all about me and what I was, and she's been as good to me as you, sir. I'd bite a finger off before I'd go crooked again in any way."

"I think you can safely depend upon that, Mr. Carter," said Mrs. Darling, smiling faintly. "Nancy has confided her entire past to me, and in overlooking it and lending her a helping hand, I now know positively that I made no mistake. She is a good girl and a capable one."

There was a suspicious moisture in Nancy's brown eyes, then fixed upon the strong, kindly face of her mistress. She colored deeply, too, when Nick extended his hand and said heartily:

"Come here, Nancy. Let's shake again. I'm more than glad to hear this and to know you are on the right track. Stick to it, my girl, as I now feel sure you will."

"You may be sure that I will, Mr. Carter," said Nancy, eagerly shaking his hand.

"Now let's proceed with this matter," Nick said, more seriously. "Mrs. Darling tells me that you advised her to appeal to me?"

"So I did, Mr. Carter," Nancy replied.

"She will answer any questions you care to ask her," Mrs. Darling put in.

"To begin with, then, what do you know about the case?" said Nick. "Was it you who last saw Mr. Darling alive?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him leaving the house and going down back of the stable."

"Did you notice anything unusual? Did he appear excited, or—"

"No, sir; not in the least," put in Nancy. "I didn't reckon anything wrong was coming off. I didn't get wise at all until the mistress told me that most of the master's money is missing."

"Wise to what, Nancy?"

"That he was killed and robbed, mebbe, instead of putting out his own light."

"Why did you suspect that?"

"Only because of two guys he has been friendly with lately. They have been here to see him, one of them quite a number of times."

"Two men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know them?" Nick inquired, turning to Mrs. Darling.

"Hardly more than by name," she replied. "My husband introduced me to one of them, named Philip Floyd, who has called several times to see him. I have met the other only once."

"What is his name?" asked Nick, proceeding to write them in his notebook.

"Ralph Sheldon. He called here a few days ago with Mr. Floyd, who introduced me to him. My husband was absent at the time and they remained only a few minutes. That is the only time I ever saw Mr. Sheldon, though my husband had frequently mentioned him."

"Are they old friends of his?"

"Quite the contrary. I never heard of them until about a month ago."

"Had they any business relations with your husband?"

"I cannot say."

"Do you know anything about them?"

"No more than I have told you," said Mrs. Darling. "My husband referred to them only as friends, and he appeared to think well of them."

"Do you know where they live?"

"I do not."

"Both were here, you say, a few days before he died."

"The day before, Mr. Carter, and both attended his funeral."

"Did they say why they wanted to see him on the day preceding his death?"

"They did not. I inferred from their remarks, however, that it was only a friendly call."

"Are they men of his own age?"

"I would say that Mr. Sheldon is nearly as old. He appears to be in the forties. Mr. Floyd, however, is not over thirty."

"Are they prepossessing men?"

"Yes, in a way, though I did not quite fancy them," said Mrs. Darling. "As for Nancy—well, she may speak for herself. It was partly her impression of them that led me to take her advice and appeal to you."

"On the dead, Mr. Carter, I would not trust either of them as far as I could throw a bull by the tail," Nancy bluntly declared, in characteristic terms. "You know me, sir. I am not easily fooled. I can read a man dead right nine times out of ten, Mr. Carter, the minute I set my eyes on him."

"You did not fancy them, then?"

"Not so you'd notice it," said Nancy. "I wouldn't say too much against the Sheldon man, Mr. Carter, for I've seen him only twice. I saw him at the funeral, and I let him in with Mr. Floyd a few days before. He's all right, mebbe, though I'd hate to bank much on it."

"What about Mr. Floyd? Why do you distrust him so seriously?"

"I have more than one reason for that hunch," said Nancy inelegantly. "For a starter, Mr. Carter, I've seen that guy before."

"Floyd?"

"Yes, sir."

"When and where, Nancy?"

"Give it up. On the dead, sir, I can't tell."

"But you feel sure of it?"

"Surest thing you know," said Nancy confidently. "I'd stake my bundle on it, Mr. Carter, and you know what that means, knowing what I was. Any man I knew in the past was most likely a crook."

Nick did not contradict her.

"Besides, he knew me, sir, the first time. I let him in here," Nancy went on. "I was wise to that, all right, but it wasn't for me to meddle with the master's affairs. So I kept my trap closed."

"Why did you think Floyd recognized you?"

"I saw his lamps light up the instant they lit on me," Nancy explained, in characteristic terms. "He looked at me like he saw a ghost."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"No, not a word, Mr. Carter. 'But no man with eyes like his is on the level. I know what I'm saying. It's like breaking sticks for me to pick out a crook from a bunch of men. Floyd is one, Mr. Carter, if ever there was one, and that's why I got the mistress to send for you. I don't forget what you did in that Maybrick case—and what you did for me, sir, never!'"

"I'm quite sure of it, Nancy," Nick replied. "You can tell me no more about the two men, I infer."

"No, sir."

"That is all, then. I will look deeper into this matter, Mrs. Darling, if you wish me to do so, under one condition."

"Any conditions you see fit to impose, Mr. Carter," she replied gratefully.

"You must leave the case entirely to me, aside from the instructions you already have given your lawyer and Doctor Lyons. I will see and inform both of them of our arrangements."

"Very well. I leave it all to you."

"And say nothing about it to others," Nick added. "There must be no publicity at present."

"I am more than anxious to avoid it," Mrs. Darling assured him.

Nick arose and took his hat from the table.

"I am going to have a look at the ruins of the boathouse," said. "If you will show me the way——"

"I will send Nancy with you."

"I prefer to go alone," Nick objected. "I will return in a very few minutes."

He left the house by the rear door, passing around the stable and down the river bank. All that remained at the boathouse and its contents was a heap of charred, black ruins. The ground near by was covered with footprints of many persons who had visited the tragic scene, but none of them were of material significance.

Nick wanted only to view the surroundings, however, and he saw with a glance that the spot was so shut in by the hill in the rear and the trees on either side, that knaves selecting it for the murder of Darling, if such was his fate, would have incurred only chance observation by persons on the river, against which effective precautions could easily have been taken.

Scarce ten minutes had passed when Nick returned and rejoined Mrs. Darling in the library. He then obtained from her a description of Floyd and Sheldon, the only two persons then seeming to invite suspicion, and he also asked to see a photograph of her husband.

"I know of only one in existence, Mr. Carter," he replied. "That was taken the year after our marriage. It is still a very good likeness of him. It is in our album. I will get it for you."

She brought the volume and opened it on the library table—only to search it vainly.

The photograph of Mr. Cyrus Darling had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

POINTERS TO CRIME.

Nick Carter made no comments upon the disappearance of the photograph, or, at least, none that expressed his thoughts. Mrs. Darling could not say how long it had been gone from the album, nor could she conceive of any reason for its removal.

"He may have led a much more gay and festive life than she suspected," thought Nick, upon leaving the house after giving her a few additional instructions. "He may also have been a thousand times more sly than she imagined. Another woman now has the photograph, perhaps, the gift of a recreant husband, who thought it easier to give her that than to sit for a new one. It would be worth while to know the woman's name, in that case—and also to know what has become of Danny Maloney."

Nick's mental digression occurred while he emerged from the driveway gate and found that his chauffeur was nowhere to be seen. The touring car stood at the curb, but there was no sign of Danny.

"H'm, that's a bit odd," Nick soliloquized, gazing in each direction. "I thought he might be merely stretching his legs. He must have seen some one, or something, that he thought it worth while to learn more about. He never neglects—ah, that will explain."

A scrap of paper protruding from under the chauffeur's seat had caught Nick's eye as he was about to enter the car. He drew it out and read, scribbled with a lead pencil:

"Don't wait for me, chief. I'll report later."

Nick smiled and sprang into the car. Ten minutes later

he arrived at the residence of Doctor Lyons, whom he found alone in his office.

"Well, well, Nick, this is an unexpected pleasure," said the physician, after their greeting. "It's ages since I have seen you. What's on your mind? I know your call is not entirely a social one, nor do you look as if you needed a prescription."

"No, I'm as right as a trivet," said Nick, smiling. "It's about the suicide of Mr. Cyrus Darling."

"What about it?"

"This is strictly between us, mind you, and must not go farther."

"Enough said. Mum's the word."

"You view the remains, I am told, and pronounced it a case of suicide?"

"Certainly. There was nothing else to it, absolutely nothing."

"I'm not so sure of it," said Nick.

"Coming from any one else, Nick, I should laugh derisively at that," Doctor Lyons replied, with a look of surprise. "Coming from you, however, it demands serious consideration. What do you mean?"

"I'm not prepared to say," Nick rejoined. "I have just begun to look into the case at the request of Mrs. Darling. When I learn anything definite, Lyons, I will make it a point to inform you."

"That's good enough for me," said the physician. "But I really think, Nick, that you are on a wild-goose chase. There's nothing to it. Darling committed suicide, Nick, as sure as you're alive."

"It will be wise to report nothing different at present," said Nick. "You may be right, of course, and I may drop the case within twenty-four hours."

"I'll wager you will."

"I would like to know how you sized up the circumstances, nevertheless," Nick went on. "Darling left a note which stated his suicidal intention, then went to the boathouse and set it on fire, immediately shooting himself. That is your opinion, I understand, briefly stated?"

"Yes, that is about the size of it," admitted the physician.

"Were you among the first to view the remains?"

"Yes. I was sent for, immediately. I saw all that remained of the unfortunate man. He was almost entirely cremated."

"You made a careful examination, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"Of the skull?"

"I examined his remains thoroughly, Nick."

"Did you find any fractured bone, or splintered, as if caused by a bullet?" Nick inquired.

"No, I did not."

"Did you find the bullet that killed him?"

"No. The body was terribly burned, parts of it being entirely consumed. It was impossible to perform a satisfactory autopsy. There is no question of his identity, however, if that is what you have in mind. Darling's ring was found on his finger. He wore a double set of false teeth, which alone are enough to establish his identity. We found some of the horn buttons on his clothing, moreover, which his wife readily recognized. Really, Nick, there is nothing to it."

"Why do you think, then, that he set fire to the building before shooting himself?"

"Possibly to make sure of his death in case he only

wounded himself. Or, perhaps, the fire was caused by the flash of the revolver. There was a lot of gasoline in the building. It may have caught from the flash of the weapon. It certainly caused a very intense fire. The house and all it contained were completely consumed."

"I was told that you still have the revolver and the articles mentioned."

"That is true."

"May I take them temporarily? I will guarantee to return them."

"Certainly," Doctor Lyons readily consented. "If, the matter were a less solemn one, however, I would wager a big round roll, Nick, that you are wasting your energies on a fog bank. There's nothing in it. Cyrus Darling killed himself, as sure as death and taxes."

"We'll let it go at that, then, for the present," said the detective, with a smile. "I will return these articles in a few days."

"Whenever convenient, Nick," replied the physician.

He had taken them from a drawer in his desk while speaking, a parcel wrapped in thick brown paper and securely tied with a string.

Nick thanked him and departed.

Half an hour later he entered the New York office of Clayton & Craige, attorneys, and was received in the private office of the senior partner.

Nick found, however, that Clayton could add but little to the information already imparted by Mrs. Darling.

Clayton stated that he had been Darling's legal adviser for a number of years, that the latter had left no will, and that his personal estate, as far as could be discovered, consisted of less than five thousand dollars. From several brokers with whom Darling had been in the habit of dealing, nevertheless, Clayton had learned that he had sold bonds and securities within two months amounting to nearly a hundred thousand dollars.

"It certainly looks bad, Mr. Carter, deucedly bad," he added gravely, after stating these facts. "Though I have not yet mentioned it to Mrs. Darling, I can form only one theory consistent with the circumstances, and that is not entirely consistent."

"What is your theory?" Nick inquired.

"I think Mr. Darling was murdered."

"By whom?"

"I have no idea, not the slightest."

"Do you know of any persons with whom he has had business relations, who might have committed the crime?"

"I do not. I am entirely in the dark."

"How would you account for the letter stating his suicidal intention? That was found in his wife's bedroom."

"It may be a forgery."

"Put in the bedroom by some one else?"

"Exactly."

"That would have been possible, perhaps, if a conspiracy existed," Nick allowed tentatively.

"Conspiracy—that's just the word," said the lawyer. "I think that Cyrus Darling was the victim of a dastardly conspiracy, Nick, carried out with infernal cleverness."

"And that his fortune was the incentive to the crime?"

"Precisely," said Clayton. "I don't know how it was framed up, of course, nor who are involved. I do believe that Darling was terribly jockeyed in some way, however, and either persuaded, or forced, to turn all of his bonds and securities into cash. I know positively that he did so,

for all of the brokers with whom he dealt are well acquainted with him and absolutely sure of his identity at the time. He certainly is the man who made the sales and received the money. There is no question about that."

"Admitting that," said Nick; "what more do you suspect?"

"I think that Darling was bunked out of it by some means and later lured to the boathouse and killed, the rascals covering their tracks by setting fire to the house, and contriving to leave a forged letter, pointing to suicide. Either that is the case, Nick, or else he got in wrong and lost all of his money, and then really committed suicide."

"You think either theory is tenable?" questioned Nick, smiling a bit oddly.

"I do think so."

"I am going to look a little deeper into the case."

"I'm glad to hear that, Carter, on my word," Clayton quickly declared. "No man would be more likely to ferret out the true solution of the mystery."

"There is no solution, Clayton, but the true solution," Nick replied. "I may require some little time. Meanwhile, kindly say and do nothing about the matter, nor reveal anything that would add to Mrs. Darling's distress. She appears to be a fine woman."

"She is a fine woman, Nick. That goes without saying, and I know what I'm talking about."

"Has Darling lived happily with her?"

"Surely," Clayton replied. "Why not, indeed? She is just the type of woman to steady a man of his temperament. He liked a good time, you know, and was easily influenced. But for her, Nick, he might have gone clean over the traces. She was his balance wheel. She kept him going nicely, instead of off on a tangent. Yes, yes, they have lived happily, all right, or I would have heard of it."

"No doubt," Nick allowed.

He took his hat and arose to go.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ANGLE OF REFLECTION.

As Nick Carter had inferred, even before finding the terse, explanatory note of his chauffeur, there was a very good reason for the disappearance of Danny Maloney. There were equally good reasons, too, for the brevity of his note and his delay in reporting at the home office.

Seated alone in the touring car after Nick had entered the Darling residence, Danny fell to watching a gang of men at work in the near distance, then installing the wires for an electric-lighting system, to one of which Nick had jestingly referred when approaching the place.

Scarce five minutes had passed, however, when, something of much more importance caught Danny's eye and instantly claimed his attention. It was the sudden appearance and significant actions of a man who rounded a corner some thirty yards back of the motionless car.

One might wonder, perhaps, how Danny, not having eyes in the back of his head, caught sight of the man the moment he turned the corner. As a matter of fact, however, Danny saw him reflected in the chauffeur's mirror clamped to the frame of the windshield, in which he could distinctly see objects back of the car.

This led to a somewhat curious situation. The man

saw the car and its solitary occupant, but he did not observe the mirror, and he evidently supposed that Danny, facing straight ahead, could not see him.

Danny easily saw the reflection, however, without turning his head. He saw the stranger stop short the moment he rounded the corner, and saw the car, at which he gazed suspiciously, which in turn was enough to arouse Danny's suspicions.

"Geel! what's eating him?" he muttered, watching him intently. "Here's a reflex, back-action discovery, for fair. He don't know I can see him; but who the dickens is he, and what's struck him?"

The man stood gazing intently, first at the car and then at the Darling residence, several times from one to the other. He appeared in doubt, uncertain what to do.

Presently, frowning darkly, he took a pencil and a letter from his pocket and made a memorandum of the envelope. Then he turned and retraced his steps and vanished around the corner as quickly as he had come.

"Geel whiz! there's nothing to it," thought Danny. "That fellow was going to the Darling residence. He was alarmed when he saw this car, and he has taken the number of it. He don't know who owns it, then, so why did he change his mind? He certainly must be off color, or he would not have feared to enter the house. But why—why be hanged! It's up to me, by gracious, to find out why."

Danny abruptly ended his vain speculations. He quickly wrote the brief note that Nick found a little later, then sprang from the car and started after the departing stranger.

Danny discovered him nearly a block away, after rounding the corner—an erect, finely built man, fashionably clad, and having all of the outward indications of a gentleman. He was about thirty years old, with dark eyes and hair and clean-cut features, in many respects a strikingly handsome man.

Danny shadowed him to the city. He saw him enter an automobile garage and consult a reference book, one containing the license numbers of New York cars and the names of their owners. His face, when he departed, wore a darker cloud, a look of increasing apprehensions.

"Geel! he's found out that the car belongs to Nick Carter," Danny readily reasoned. "That don't seem to please him worth a cent, which shows that my suspicions are all to the good. I'll not lose sight of him, by gracious, until I learn who he is and where he hangs out."

Danny then shadowed him to a leading hotel, where his quarry spent nearly an hour at lunch in the café, afterward sauntering out and bringing up, ten minutes later, near a large West Side apartment house, then known as the Ashburton Chambers.

This house evidently was his destination, for he gazed up at one of the side windows when crossing a street on the corner of which the lofty building stood.

"He's got a date with some one," thought Danny, watching him from the opposite side of the avenue. "Or mebbe he has a suite there and—no, by ginger, I was right. He's here to see that woman."

She emerged from a side door of the house just as the man was crossing the street—a finely formed woman in a stylish walking costume, a figure so striking and graceful that Danny at once felt sure that he had seen her before. Her face was partly hidden under a polka-dotted veil, however, precluding immediate recognition.

They caught sight of one another at the same moment, and the man stopped on the corner, while the woman hastened to join him. Remaining there, apparently heedless of numerous passing pedestrians, they entered into a subdued and earnest conversation, the gravity of which was obvious.

"I've got to have a nearer look at her," thought Danny. "I'm dead sure I've seen her before. Mebbe, too, I can get a line on what they are talking about by passing near them."

Retracting his steps, he quickly crossed the avenue and then slowly approached the couple, sauntering by them. He then saw the woman's face distinctly—her large, lustrous eyes, glowing darkly through the meshes of her veil; her attractive features and clear, velvety complexion; her finely formed mouth and rounded chin—a strikingly handsome face, of that type and character for which men sometimes lose their heads.

"Great guns!" Danny muttered. "It's Kate Crandall, that fly beauty who figured in the Maybrick case. She tried to throw down the church rector because he would not marry her. She must have found an easier way to get money and plenty of it, if fine feathers cut any ice."

Danny paused in the broad main entrance to the house and furtively watched the couple. He had tried in vain to catch a word or two of their conversation. He now saw the man show Kate Crandall the memorandum made on his letter, and he rightly inferred that they were talking about the touring car and its owner.

Presently, parting abruptly, the man hailed a taxicab and rode away, while Kate Crandall quickly approached the front entrance to the house.

Danny as quickly withdrew to the office, where he began an examination of the register.

Kate Crandall entered and approached the counter, speaking to the clerk.

"If Ralph Sheldon comes in, Tom, send him up to my suite, will you?" she said familiarly.

"Certainly," replied the clerk. "Does that go until evening?"

"It goes until he shows up," replied Kate, with significant emphasis. "I will be at home all of this evening."

"I'll keep him in mind."

"Thanks."

Kate turned quickly away and entered the elevator.

Danny decided that he had picked up all that was coming to him, and he started for home. It was nearly six o'clock when he entered the house, and found Nick in his business office with his two chief assistants, Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan.

On the office table lay the several articles Nick had obtained from Doctor Lyons, which he was just beginning to examine, already having told Chick and Patsy about the case as thus far set forth.

It took Danny only a few minutes to report what he had seen and heard, and it was very nearly in line with what Nick had expected.

"Good work, Danny, very good work," he said approvingly. "It will help some, my lad, even more than you imagine. I have left the car at the curbing. Take charge of it, please."

"Sure thing, Mr. Carter," cried Danny, glad to feel that he had been of service.

"So Kate Crandall is at the Ashburton Chambers, eh?"

remarked Nick, with thoughtful frown. "I have wondered what became of her after that Maybrick affair. She is about as attractive a woman as one often meets, but she has an infernally evil streak in her."

"You think she figures in this affair?" Chick inquired.

"I certainly do," Nick declared. "Danny undoubtedly is right in thinking that the unknown man was going to the Darling residence. The fact that he has an interest there, and also in Kate Crandall, denotes plainly enough that Cyrus Darling also had an interest in the woman. The stranger, in view of his conduct, forms a connecting link between the other two, so to speak."

"I see the point," Chick replied.

"Gee! that point is plain enough," put in Patsy. "But, holy smoke, it must be a case of suicide. How else can you size it up, chief? Darling had been in the dumps for two or three months, as down in the mouth as a sick horse, according to his wife's story. Crooks could not have forced him to feign despondency for that length of time. In my opinion, chief, he just about blew in all of his money with some other woman, and blew out his brains when his bundle was gone. That's how I size it up."

"Really?" queried Nick dryly.

"That's what. He certainly shot himself, chief, if what Doctor Lyons told you is true."

"If what Doctor Lyons told me is true, Patsy, you probably are entirely wrong."

"Wrong?"

"It's a hundred to one."

"Why so, chief?"

"Because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a person who commits suicide with a revolver shoots himself in the head," said Nick. "That is the most natural spot for a suicide to select. He knows that a bullet in the brain will instantly render him insensible and preclude conscious suffering. Even if he does not stop to reason about it, he instinctively selects his head in which to send the fatal bullet. The records corroborate me. How often do you hear of a man shooting himself in the heart or lungs?"

"Very seldom, indeed," Chick agreed. "I don't know that I ever heard of a case."

"But what of that?" questioned Patsy argumentatively.

"I don't see how that cuts any ice. Darling could have shot himself in the head."

"I admit that he could—but he didn't," Nick said dryly.

"Why are you so sure of it, chief?"

"Because the bullet would have made a hole in his skull. Even if sent into his mouth, or through an eye, it would surely have passed through the brain and have fractured, at least, the back of the skull. Doctor Lyons is positive, however, that the skull was intact. I questioned him particularly about that. Admitting that my premises are correct, then, it's a hundred to one that Cyrus Darling did not shoot himself."

"Gee! there's no getting around that argument," Patsy thoughtfully allowed. "You must be right, chief, after all."

"I think so."

"But how came the revolver near him? Some one else must have shot him. In that case, chief, he must have been murdered, as Doctor Lyons and Lawyer Clayton suspect."

"On the contrary, Patsy, both of them are wrong," Nick said confidently. "Cyrus Darling was not shot at all."

"Not shot at all!" echoed Patsy incredulously.

"That is my opinion."

"Gee! that beats me. Why was the revolver there, then? Why—"

"Stop a moment," Nick interrupted. "You have just said, Patsy, that crooks could not have forced Darling to feign despondency for eight consecutive weeks. If so, then, his despondency must either have been voluntarily feigned, or else it must have been genuine."

"Sure thing, chief. That's plain enough."

"One fact, however, indicates that it was not genuine," Nick proceeded. "I refer to the fact that he recently spent many evenings in town, far more than in the past. His wife thinks he sought diversion to relieve his depression. He did not, however, permit her to accompany him. That's a very significant point."

"It is wholly inconsistent in a husband seeking such relief. He would have wanted his wife with him to cheer him up and help divert his mind—barring one contingency."

"Namely, chief?"

"Another attraction."

"Gee! there may be something in that," said Patsy, quick to see the point. "You mean another woman."

"Exactly."

"Kate Crandall."

"Quite likely, Patsy, in view of what Danny discovered."

"Gee whiz! things are shaping up," said Patsy, laughing. "I begin to think you are right, chief."

"Let's see, now, in how far this is confirmed by Darling's conduct during the past three months," said Nick. "It was then that his wife first noticed his reticence and lack of customary affection."

"He must have been bestowing it upon the other."

"Quite likely," Nick dryly agreed. "Then came a long period of increasing depression, relieved by frequent evenings in town, ostensibly alone. Later he sold his business, also his bonds and securities. Obviously, he wanted all of his funds in cash. Finally came the suicide, the letter stating his intention, and the burning of the boathouse, which nearly consumed the corpse and precluded absolute identification."

"By Jove, Nick, you evidently think the whole business was faked," said Chick abruptly.

"That is precisely what I think."

"And that Cyrus Darling is not dead?"

"Exactly."

"But the body—"

"One obtained for a blind," Nick interrupted. "Really, Chick, this entire combination of circumstances admits of no other conclusion. Darling's conduct during the past three months, as I have just sized it up; the selection of the boathouse for the supposed suicide, where the arrangements for such a fraud could have been easily and secretly made, as well as a quick and undetected getaway on the river after the trick was turned; the setting fire to the building in order to cremate the corpse and preclude identification except by means of articles placed on it, the garments, ring, and even the false teeth of the supposed victim—all point to one conclusion, Chick; that the job was a frame-up from beginning to end."

"By Jove, it's a curious case, Nick, if you are right," Chick answered.

"Not so very curious. It's a case of a lost head."

"A lost head?"

"Exactly. That of a man who has lost his head. It's up to us to help him find it and set it back on his shoulders—if not too late."

"Lost his head for a woman? Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely."

"But why do you think we may be too late?"

"Because, though a week has passed since the supposed suicide, the cat has not jumped," said Nick enigmatically.

"I don't get you."

"Nor I, chief," put in Patsy. "What cat has not jumped?"

"The two-legged cat responsible for the whole business," Nick explained. "We can safely assume, the foregoing being correct, that Darling turned his fortune into cash with a view to leaving the country with the woman; that he aimed to create a belief that he is dead, presumably to prevent investigations, pursuit, and a possible lawsuit, with consequent alimony, and that he intended living abroad under a fictitious name with the woman."

"That now seems perfectly reasonable," Chick agreed.

"The question is, then, assuming Kate Crandall to be the woman, why have they not jumped the country?" Nick added. "Why the delay? Why is she established in the Ashburton Chambers? Why the continued interest in the Darling residence, as appears in what Danny saw and heard? That shows plainly enough that she is the woman involved. It is confirmed by her acquaintance with Ralph Sheldon, mentioned by Mrs. Darling as a friend of her husband. His friendship may be of the left-handed kind."

"Most likely, Nick."

"All this, then, denotes that something has gone wrong. Why has Darling not fled with the woman? Has he been given the double cross? He may have been bunkoed out of his big bundle of cash and—well, there is no telling what has become of him. It's up to us to find out."

"I get you now, Nick," Chick nodded. "He may, after all, be the man found dead in the boathouse."

Nick quickly shook his head.

"I don't think so," said he. "If there were evidence showing positively that he was shot, rather than the contrary, I might think the rascals killed him. His going there voluntarily, however, his feigning despondency for close upon two months, apparently paving the way to get by with a fake suicide—all convinces me that he was not killed."

"I see."

"This is further confirmed by the removal of his photograph, which Mrs. Darling thinks is the only one in existence."

"What was his object in removing it?"

"To prevent broadcast publication of it in the newspapers, in case the truth was suspected," said Nick. "Verbal descriptions cut no great ice. A picture, however, has brought many a knave to the ringbolt. He was heading off that means of identification, exposure, and arrest."

"Geel! that listens good to me, chief," said Patsy. "Ten to one it hits the nail on the head."

"I feel reasonably sure of it."

"But what are your plans?" Chick inquired. "If Darling is up against a gang, as you suspect, and they dis-

cover that his wife has put us on the case, it's long odds that they will lose no time in bolting."

"That's the very point I was coming to," Nick said, more forcibly. "They must have discovered it. Danny's report convinces me of that. Kate Crandall knows it, also the unknown man who informed her. He must be identified. We have Danny's description of him, which will probably be recognized by persons employed in the Ashburton Chambers, if he has been in the habit of visiting Kate Crandall."

"No doubt."

"You tackle that part of the work, Chick, and we'll get after these suspects before they can make a successful get-away."

"But Kate Crandall said she would be in her apartments all of this evening, chief," Patsy reminded him. "That don't look much like bolting."

"That may have been only a blind," Nick replied. "She may have feared that she already was being watched, or that the clerk might be questioned later. Be that as it may, we'll lose no time in seeking tangible proof of my suspicions. While Chick is hunting up the unknown man, Patsy, you see what you can learn about Ralph Sheldon and Philip Floyd."

"I've got you, chief."

"If the former visits Kate Crandall, as she directed, we may be lucky enough to clinch the case and round up the entire gang this very evening," Nick added, rising abruptly. "I'll tackle Kate Crandall personally. I'll find out in short order what she knows about Cyrus Darling."

"That's the stuff, chief," cried Patsy.

"We'll be off at once. Danny is still waiting. We can make the Ashburton Chambers in twenty minutes."

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

Nick Carter entered the Ashburton Chambers soon after eight o'clock that evening. He did not send up his card to Kate Crandall. He sauntered in and bought some cigars of a girl clerk in charge of the counter. While lighting one, he inquired carelessly:

"Have you seen Ralph Sheldon here this evening?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "He came in half an hour ago. I saw him talking with the clerk. I guess he went up to his suite."

"To the woman's suite," thought Nick, recalling what Danny had reported. Then, indifferently: "I heard to-day that Mr. Sheldon is living here."

"Yes, sir. He has a suite with Mr. Floyd on the third floor. They have been here about two months."

"Philip Floyd?"

"Yes, sir. But I don't think he is here to-day. He travels a good deal of the time. The clerk can tell you."

"It's not material," said Nick, turning away.

He sauntered out and around to the side door of the house, throwing away his cigar, then entered and took the elevator, saying to the man in charge:

"Miss Crandall's apartments."

"Third floor, sir," directed the man. "Number ninety-eight, to the right."

"Number ninety-eight?" queried Nick. "I thought Ralph Sheldon had that suite."

"No, sir. He and Mr. Floyd have number ninety-four, rear corridor."

Nick did not reply. He stepped out on the third floor and turned to the right. The dimly lighted corridor was deserted. It ran parallel with one side of the house and led to a stairway and a narrow passage back of some of the rear apartments, evidently a passage and stairway designed for the use of servants and the removal of sweepings and rubbish.

Nick found that Kate Crandall's suite was the last in the side corridor. He paused at the door and listened, hearing nothing, and he then crouched and peered through the keyhole. He could see a thread of light under an inner door, which precluded hearing voices from within, and he then knocked sharply on one of the panels.

There was no response.

Nick waited a few moments, then knocked again, which had the desired result. The door was opened by the woman he was seeking.

She was not conventionally clad for receiving visitors. Her fine figure was enveloped in a voluminous woolen wrapper. Her feet were thrust into a pair of worsted slippers. She appeared to have been on the verge of getting ready for bed. She drew back with a look of surprise on her darkly handsome face.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "I thought one of the hall-boys knocked. What do you want?"

"An interview with you," Nick tersely informed her. "Don't pretend, Miss Crandall, that you do not recognize me. A woman never forgets the face of a person she dislikes."

"I did not so pretend," Kate retorted. "I knew you immediately, Mr. Carter, but I cannot imagine why you want an interview with me."

"I will presently inform you," said Nick. "May I come in?"

"Certainly."

"You are alone?"

"Of course. I am nearly always alone here. I have a headache and was thinking of going to bed," Kate glibly asserted.

"That is why, perhaps, you were so long in answering my knock," Nick remarked, more sharply eyeing her.

"Precisely," Kate nodded. "I was near not answering it at all. I am glad I did, however. As for disliking you, Mr. Carter, that is absurd. I bear you no ill-will for the part you played in that Maybrick affair. I was not seriously involved in it. I always make it a point not to lay myself liable."

"To the law, you mean?"

"To the law—certainly," she bluntly admitted. "What else would I mean? I'll keep out of the grabnet of the law, Mr. Carter, you can safely bet on that."

Nick wondered whether it was true, or only a bluff designed to dispel his suspicions. He had followed her into an attractively furnished parlor, where he instantly detected the odor of cigarette smoke. He wondered, too, whether he really had found her alone, or whether some male visitor, possibly Ralph Sheldon, had hurriedly concealed himself in one of the adjoining rooms.

"Have a chair," Kate added. "Really, Mr. Carter, I am quite pleased to see you, for all you think I dislike you. What do you want to interview me about? You have piqued my curiosity."

"You said you were alone here," Nick remarked, instead of answering her question.

"So I was until you came in."

"Really?"

"Sure! Why should I deceive you?"

"That's the question," said Nick. "I think that you have."

He had leaned nearer to her while taking a chair, so near that his head almost touched hers, for she then was seated.

"That I have deceived you?" she asked, gazing at him.

"Surely."

"How so?"

"Some person was smoking a cigarette here within a very few minutes."

Kate Crandall laughed and tossed her head.

"Dear me, is that why you think so?" she said derisively. "Really, Mr. Carter, you are not near as keen and clever as you think you are."

"No?"

"Far from it. It was cute in you, of course, to detect cigarette smoke so quickly. But I was the smoker. You'll find the end of my cigarette in the cuspidor, if you care to look. Here is the box." Kate took it from the pocket of her woolen robe. "Have one. They seem to steady one's nerves for a time. It may sharpen you up a bit."

"My wits don't need the grindstone," Nick replied dryly.

"No?" queried Kate, with his own tentative intonation.

"Far from it," said Nick, imitating her. "You are the one who is not keen and clever. You were not the smoker, Miss Crandall. When a woman has just smoked a cigarette, the scent of it may be easily detected in her hair. I smelled of yours when I sat down."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Now, having eliminated you, who was your visitor? Why did he hide when I knocked? I know, of course, that he did not depart, or I should have seen him."

Kate Crandall's mocking smile had given way to a frown, but it was not of long duration.

"You are very much mistaken, Mr. Carter," she replied. "He left just before you arrived. If you think any person is concealed in my apartments, you are at liberty to search them."

"No, indeed; it is not material."

"I fail to see why you have any interest in me, or my visitor," Kate quickly added. "Please explain. Why are you here? What have you to say?"

"I want you to do most of the saying," Nick replied. "Tell me, and give it to me straight, what do you know about Mr. Cyrus Darling?"

Kate Crandall heard him without a change of countenance.

"Well, just now, Mr. Carter, I know nothing about him," she said pointedly. "He's dead."

"What did you know about him when alive, then?" Nick demanded.

"Very little. So little, Mr. Carter, that I'm quite ashamed of myself."

"Why so?"

"Because, when I discovered the truth, it was not at all to my liking."

"What truth?"

"That he was a married man."

"Do you mean that you did not know it before he died?"

"That's just what I mean."

"How long had you known him?"

"Something like three months."

"Were you friends?"

"The best of friends. I supposed, in fact, that we were to become something more," Kate significantly added.

"You mean?"

"In other words, Mr. Carter, I supposed that Cyrus Darling was going to marry me, and that I should roll in wealth for the rest of my life. Imagine my chagrin, dismay, and disappointment, therefore, when I learned that he had killed himself—and that a wife was mourning his tragic end. Perdition! I could have cut off my two ears, for having listened to his treacherous love avowals."

Nick Carter now saw plainly that this woman had no intention of bolting, that she had taken a position she felt sure she could maintain, and that she was not to be easily frightened or intimidated. All this appeared in her darkly glowing eyes, her look of covert contempt and defiance, and in the utter lack of anything like apprehension on her part. Nick gazed at her intently for a moment, then asked bluntly:

"Do you expect me to believe, Miss Crandall, that you did not know Darling was married?"

"I don't care whether you believe it, Mr. Carter, or not," she deliberately answered, meeting him eye to eye while she lighted a cigarette. "What is that to me? The fact is not altered by what you believe."

"It is a fact, then?"

"Yes, positively."

"You are acquainted with Ralph Sheldon, aren't you?"

"I am."

"And Philip Floyd?"

"Yes."

"Are they friends of yours?"

"I think so," Kate coolly nodded. "I have no reason to doubt it."

"Why, then, did they not tell you that Darling was a married man?" Nick demanded. "They knew it."

"And they supposed that I knew it," Kate curtly explained. "They had no idea that I was ignorant of it. They saw me with Darling only occasionally, and they attributed no special significance to it."

"No?"

"Why should they?" she added, a bit sharply. "Why should they meddle with my affairs? I wonder at your presuming to do so—though I know, of course, that yours is a meddlesome business and you a prince of meddlers. What's it all about? What's the answer? What are you driving at, anyway?"

"You will learn in time," Nick informed her. "If what you imply is true, then, you were not used quite right by Darling."

"No—quite the contrary."

"Why have you still an interest in his affairs, then?"

"In his affairs?"

"That's what I said."

"Nonsense! I have no such interest," Kate declared, with a stony stare. "I have wiped his name off my slate."

"Who is your friend, then, who has such an interest?"

"My friend?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand you," snapped Kate. "Come across plainly, Mr. Carter, if you wish me to continue this interview. I'll not stand for any beating around a bush. What friend of mine do you mean?"

"The man you talked with on the street a short time ago," Nick said bluntly. "The man who told you he had seen my touring car at the Darling residence this afternoon."

Kate Crandall's eyes dilated perceptibly under her knitted brows. The shot was evidently not expected, but it did not appear to disturb her seriously. She tossed away her cigarette, nevertheless, asking, a bit resentfully:

"What is it to you, Carter, anyway? Why are you putting me through the wringer in this fashion? What are you trying to dig up? I tell you right here and now that you've got nothing on me. My relations with Cyrus Darling were open and above board. He was the only one guilty of any duplicity. I was the one deceived—and his wife! What are you out after, anyway?"

"You are evading my question," Nick said pointedly.

"What question?"

"Who is the man with whom you talked this afternoon?" Nick repeated. "If you are strictly on the level, as you assert, you should be willing to tell me."

"Willing be hanged!" snapped Kate inelegantly. "You make me tired, Carter, when you get one of these meddlesome wasps in your bonnet. Why, I am more than willing to tell you, if you are really anxious to know."

"Tell me, then."

"The man was Jim Dacey, a very good friend of mine," said Kate. "That's why he came to tell me that he had seen a car thought to be yours at the Darling residence. He even went and looked up the number, to be sure of it."

"But why did he hasten to inform you?"

"He feared that I might be involved in some way because of my relations with Darling, so he came to put me on my guard," Kate glibly explained. "But there was no occasion, not the slightest occasion."

"Indeed?"

"Not the slightest," Kate forcibly repeated.

"Who is this man, Dacey, and where does he hang out?" Nick then inquired, not yet in a position to contradict the woman. "Why was he going to the Darling residence? What is his interest there? Why did he —"

"Stop a moment!" Kate exclaimed, lurching forward in her chair. "What do you think I am, Carter, an information bureau? I'll stand for this no longer. I don't know what you suspect, nor care, and you evidently don't intend to enlighten me. It's a mighty poor rule that won't work both ways. I've told you all I'm going to tell you. If you want to learn more of Cyrus Darling, or of Jim Dacey, or of Sheldon and Floyd—go and question them. You'll get no more out of me."

Nick saw that she meant it.

"Wait and see," he remarked, rising.

"I can wait," Kate retorted. "Go elsewhere with your questions."

"That is precisely what I shall do."

"Go ahead, then. It's up to you. Go where you please. I'm going to bed."

CHAPTER VI.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

Nick Carter had an object in not revealing his suspicions to Kate Crandall and attempting to force a different story from her. He had seen plainly that such an attempt would be useless, that the woman felt secure in the position she had taken and was prepared to stick to her statements.

Nick believed very few of them, however. He keenly realized, nevertheless, that they ordinarily would appear perfectly plausible, that a woman is always given the benefit of a doubt in such cases, and that her story would be very generally accepted unless he could find positive evidence with which to refute it.

"There is only one way it can be done. That's by producing the supposed suicide himself," Nick decided, a bit grimly, after leaving her. "She was expecting my visit and had prepared herself for it. That was as plain as twice two. I scored one point on her, nevertheless, that she was not expecting, and, which may prove to be her undoing.

"She certainly was rattled for a moment when she learned that I knew of Dacey's doings. It forced her to come across with a plausible explanation. Not having anticipated that contingency, however, there may be a weak spot in her arrangements with Sheldon, or Floyd. I'll try to find it. I'll hunt up Sheldon before she can communicate with him and put him on his guard. I'll see whether he will tell precisely the same story. Rear corridor, suite number ninety-four, eh? This must be the way."

Hastening through several diverging corridors, Nick had entered one leading to the rear of the house. He would not delay to hunt up Chick and Patsy, being anxious to find the subject as quickly as possible, and it was less than five minutes after his parting from Kate Crandall, when Nick arrived at the door of Ralph Sheldon's apartments. He listened vainly, then knocked. It brought an immediate response.

"Come in!"

Nick entered the parlor of an attractively furnished suite. A table covered with books and newspapers occupied the middle of the room. Amid them stood a library lamp with a large, drooping silk shade of Nile-green color, which deflected the light upon, and immediately around the table, leaving other parts of the room in semi-obscurity, causing Nick to think at first sight that it was only dimly-lighted.

In the bright glow close to the table, however, sat the solitary occupant of the room. He was lounging in a large armchair, with his slippers on, and his tall figure wrapped in a long house robe. He seemed to be a man of fifty, of refined appearance, with hair and beard slightly shot with gray. He wore black-rimmed glasses and was reading a book, over which he gazed inquiringly when the detective entered.

"Sheldon himself," thought Nick, recalling Nancy Nordeck's description of the man. "Alone and absorbed in a book. It's odds, then, I'm ahead of any warning from Kate Crandall. She certainly has not been here since I left her."

These conclusions flashed through Nick's mind while he bowed and said:

"I am looking for Mr. Floyd, or Mr. Sheldon. You are one or the other, I infer."

"My name is Sheldon," he replied, drawing up in his chair. "Mr. Floyd is out just now, but he may return at any moment. What is your business?"

"I want a little information which I think you, or Mr. Floyd, can give me."

"Certainly. Sit down, Mr.—"

"Carter," put in Nick. "I am a detective."

"Not—not Nick Carter?" faltered Sheldon inquiringly, with a look of surprise.

"Yes. I see that you have heard of me."

"Who has not?" and Sheldon smiled significantly. "But I do not recall having seen you before. I am glad to meet you."

He certainly spoke as if pleased, but his smile appeared forced and his cheeks were pale. When he extended his hand without rising, moreover, Nick detected that it was trembling slightly and then noted that it felt abnormally cold and clammy.

"I am glad to find you here," he replied, taking a chair near the table. "You were, I am told, a friend of the late Cyrus Darling."

"Yes, in a way," said Sheldon, settling back in his chair and fixedly eyeing the detective.

"In a way?" echoed Nick. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I met him only a few times," Sheldon explained. "I called once at his residence in company with Mr. Floyd, but we did not find him at home."

Nick could not deny that this coincided exactly with what Nancy Nordeck had told him.

"I did not know him well," Sheldon added. "Floyd was much better acquainted with him. What about him, Mr. Carter, that you are seeking information?"

"I have been employed to do so."

"By whom?"

"His wife."

"For what reason? What is the occasion?"

"Have you no idea?" Nick inquired, with sharper scrutiny.

"I—not the blightest," Sheldon quickly shook his head. "I knew nothing about Darling's personal affairs. I know only that he shot himself, and—ah, here is Floyd, now," he abruptly digressed. "You are just in time, Phil. Shake hands with Mr. Nicholas Carter, the famous detective. He is after information about Cyrus Darling. You can tell him; perhaps, what he wants to know."

Floyd had entered while Sheldon was speaking, and Nick detected an accent of relief in the latter's voice.

Floyd appeared to be about thirty, a compactly built man, under medium height, clad in a stylish plaid suit and a soft felt hat. He was very dark, his hair thick and curly, his mustache long and drooping, completely hiding his mouth. He wore gold-rimmed glasses, through which he fixed a pair of searching black eyes upon the detective, bowing indifferently and not tendering his hand.

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Carter," he said, sitting directly opposite Nick at the table. "Information about Cyrus Darling, eh? He's dead. What's the big idea? What do you want to know about him?"

There was a sinister flippancy in this man's voice and manner that Nick did not fancy. Like Nancy Nordeck, too, he somehow felt that he had seen Philip Floyd be-

fore, but he could not even vaguely determine when, or where.

Nick did feel positive, however, that Floyd was bent upon putting up a bluff, that he was by far the more nervy man of these two, and that Sheldon was much relieved by his timely arrival. All this presently impelled Nick to venture a counterbluff, which proved more effective than he anticipated.

"I want to know anything about him, Mr. Floyd, that you can tell me," he replied.

"But what's the big idea?" Floyd repeated, staring steadily at Nick. "Why are you seeking information about a dead man? Is there anything wrong with his record?"

"That's what I wish to learn."

"Who put you on the job?"

"His wife."

"Why so? Why has she gone up in the air? What does she suspect?" Floyd glibly inquired.

"It does not much matter what she thinks," Nick slowly answered. "That's neither here nor there at this stage of the game."

"Humph! Is that so?"

"What I suspect is much more material. I came here to ask a few questions, Mr. Floyd, not to answer a string of inquiries from you. Please bear that in mind."

Nick's voice had taken on a subtle and somewhat threatening ring. He gazed at his hearers with a sharper gleam in his impressive eyes. He saw Floyd frown quickly, while Sheldon's bearded face grew quite haggard and ghastly in the greenish light cast upon it through the drooping silk shade.

"Bear it in mind, eh?" Floyd curtly questioned.

"That's what I said," Nick returned.

"Why do you speak like that? I'm not likely to answer questions put to me in that fashion."

"Oh, yes, you are," Nick retorted. "Otherwise, I shall take steps to compel you to answer them. Bear that in mind, also."

Floyd jerked his chair nearer the table.

"See here, Mr. Carter, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded aggressively. "What do you suspect, that you come here and——"

"Never mind what I suspect," Nick interrupted. "What I want to know, Mr. Floyd, is what sort of a game you and Sheldon and Kate Crandall are playing? How does Jim Dacey figure in it? What are you scheming to get from Cyrus Darling by——"

"Get from him be hanged!" Floyd cut in sharply. "You're talking through your hat. Cyrus Darling is dead and buried——"

"No, he isn't."

"Not dead?"

"Not by a long chalk!" Nick sternly declared. "He is alive, very much alive, as I shall presently convince you. I know that without your informing me. I know, too, that you fellows are responsible for his supposed suicide. I know that you——"

Nick stopped short at that point.

Floyd's right hand suddenly appeared above the edge of the table. It held a revolver—aimed point-blank at the detective's breast.

"You know too much, Carter, for your own good," he hissed viciously between his teeth. "If you move foot

or finger, I'll send a bullet through your heart. Sit quiet, Sheldon, and keep your mouth shut."

Nick Carter did not appear at all disturbed by the sudden threatening turn of the situation. He had deliberately invited it, in fact, though it came so much more quickly than he expected, that it found him partly unprepared. Without stirring from his position, he gazed across the table at Floyd's hard-set face, replying sternly:

"Your threat is equivalent to a confession. You have decided, then, to fly your true colors. That is what I wanted."

"True colors be hanged!" snapped Floyd. "You'll never discover my true colors, Nick Carter, nor get me under your infernal heel. Keep your hands where I can see them, or you'll get all that's coming to you."

Nick saw that the hand gripping the weapon was as steady as the voice uttering the threat. He saw, too, that the scowling rascal meant what he said, though his confederate, Sheldon, had gone as white and mute as a corpse.

"I shall do nothing to invite a bullet, Mr. Floyd," he coolly answered, though watchful to seize the slightest opportunity to reverse the situation. "I value a whole skin too highly. But matters cannot remain as they stand. What do you propose doing, now that you have held me up, and——"

"You'll soon see," snapped Floyd, interrupting. Then, with voice raised: "Hurry up, Martin! Get a move on! Come here, and——"

Nick cut him short in characteristic fashion. For the hundredth part of a second Floyd's eyes were diverted from him. Nick saw the opportunity, and seized it. He heard hurried steps in an adjoining room. He lifted his knees as quick as a flash and upset the table—just as a portiere behind him was cast aside and two brawny, powerful men bounded into the room.

What followed was of brief duration.

The table and books went crashing to the floor.

Sheldon caught the lamp as it was falling.

Nick reached over the toppling table, and, with a lightninglike move, snatched the revolver from Floyd's hand.

At the same moment came a blow from behind, dealt with the weapon of one of the ruffians who had entered. It was impossible for the detective to avoid it. It fell squarely on the back of his head, knocking him senseless on the instant. He dropped without so much as a groan, face forward over the table.

Floyd seized the ribbons again.

"Quick!" he cried fiercely. "Take him to my room. The crash must have been heard. Some one may come to investigate it. Wait here, Sheldon, and explain. State that you fell against the table and upset it. This way, Martin, this way! We must get him out of the house, Jim, or our game will go by the board."

Meantime, Nick was being hurriedly removed from the suite, through a rear door.

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Nick Carter had accomplished his object, but at some little cost. He had aimed to force the suspects into some impetuous move that would fully confirm his suspicions.

He had expected it to follow his assertion that Cyrus Darling was alive, and that the supposed suicide was but part of a knavish scheme, including Kate Crandall, Jim Dacey, and Cyrus Darling himself. The speedy effect of his declarations, however, as well as the resources of the rascals, had exceeded his anticipations.

But there was still another reason for the sudden aggressive move made by Philip Floyd, a reason that Nick could not possibly have anticipated, yet which alone necessitated the desperate step Floyd had taken.

Patsy Garvan was responsible for it, though not because of any fault on his part. Following the instructions that Nick had given them, Patsy and Chick arrived at the Ashburton Chambers about ten minutes after Nick, separating before entering, Patsy to look up Sheldon and Floyd, while Chick undertook to identify the suspect seen by Dauny in company with Kate Crandall that afternoon.

Nick had remarked, before leaving home, that, with three strings to their bow, there certainly should be something doing—and there was.

Patsy entered the house about ten minutes after Nick went up to Kate Crandall's suite, and, as luck would have it, he shaped the same course that his chief had taken. He began his work with buying a cigar and interrogating the girl clerk with precisely the same question.

"Have you seen Ralph Sheldon here this evening?" The girl laughed while giving Patsy his change.

"You're not alone," she remarked. "Another man just asked the same question."

"That so?" queried Patsy, knowing it must have been Nick. "How long ago was that?"

"Not more than ten minutes," said the girl. "Sheldon must be in demand this evening. He was talking with the clerk a short time ago. I guess you'll find him in his suite, third floor, rear corridor, number ninety-four."

"Thanks," said Patsy, with a smile. "It's not material."

"That's just what the other man said," replied the girl, laughing.

"Geel! I must be walking right in the chief's tracks," thought Patsy, moving away. "That denotes that I've got a long head, at least; but I must cut it out, all the same, or some one may get wise to what we are doing. It's odds that the chief took the elevator, so I'll vary the program by hoofing it."

Patsy knew, of course, that Nick had gone to seek an interview with Kate Crandall, as he had stated.

"I'll look up Sheldon's suite," he said to himself. "If he still was with the Crandall woman, it's odds that he left when the chief showed up. He may be with a confederate in his apartments by this time, in which case their conversation might enable me to clinch the chief's suspicions, if I can contrive to overhear it. I'll locate the suite, at all events, and find out what's doing."

Patsy climbed the stairs to the second floor, then sought a corridor leading to the rear of the house. He found it with no great difficulty, but upon entering the corridor adjoining the rear rooms, he turned in the wrong direction to find the main stairway.

He brought up in a narrow, dimly lighted hall, instead, and at the narrow stairway already mentioned.

"Geel, I'm in wrong!" he muttered, glancing at several doors in the dim, uncarpeted entry. "I ought to have gone the other way. These stairs will take me up to the

next floor, however, and the rear corridor must run parallel with one of this floor. These doors must be rear exits from some of the side and back suites. I'll go up and have a look."

Patsy started up the stairs with the last.

The long corridor through which he had just come was deserted. The narrow entry and stairway appeared to be, for the use of servants only, and entirely out of use at that hour.

Nevertheless, while still only part way up the stairs, Patsy suddenly heard the rustle of skirts and hurried footsteps in the narrow entry on the third floor.

He stopped short and listened.

The sounds ceased in a moment, and Patsy thought he heard the cautious closing of a door. Uncertain as to the last, however, he remained motionless on the stairs, holding his breath, and listened intently for several moments.

"By Jove, that's mighty strange," he said to himself. "I certainly heard a woman's steps and the rustle of skirts. She was in a hurry, too, yet was moving stealthily. That ought to signify something. Have I stumbled upon a rear entrance to Kate Crandall's suite? Has she eluded the chief by stealing out of a back door? Geel! I'd better look into this."

Patsy's suspicion was perfectly natural under the circumstances. It acted upon him like a spur, moreover. He crept quickly up to the third landing and glanced through the narrow hall.

It was unoccupied. The several doors were closed. A short side entry around a corner, and several feet from the stairs, caught Patsy's eye. That also was deserted. It contained only a single door, also closed, and Patsy stole nearer to it and listened.

He could hear no sound from within, nor detect any sign of light on the threshold. He stole away, retracing his steps, and listened at one of the other doors, then another and still another.

Patsy paused longer at the last, then suddenly crouched and tried vainly to peer through the keyhole. He had heard a man's voice from within, crying curtly:

"Come in!"

"Geel, he's not addressing me," thought Patsy. "He couldn't have heard my catlike tread."

Then other words reached his ears, and a familiar voice.

"Holy smoke! it's the chief himself," he muttered. "He just inquired for Sheldon, or Floyd. He has just arrived in Sheldon's suite, as sure as I'm a foot high, instead of interviewing Kate Crandall. He already has seen her, mebbe, and—"

Patsy's inference was correct, but his rapid train of thought ended abruptly. He heard a sound from the direction of the stairs. He thought some one was ascending them.

"Geel! I must not be caught playing the spy here," flashed through his mind. "Nor must I lose the chance of doing so later. I'll hide in the side entry."

He darted toward it on the instant, eager to round the corner before the approaching person could arrive at the head of the stairs—on which Patsy still supposed him to be.

He had, however, mistaken the precise direction of the sound. He moved like a flash, yet as noiselessly as a shadow. He turned the corner at nearly top speed and

collided violently with another—none other than Mr. Philip Floyd.

Patsy needed no introduction to him. The description of him provided by Nancy Nordeck and Mrs. Darling was fresh in his mind. There could be no mistaking him under the circumstances—his dark face, his piercing black eyes, and his drooping black mustache.

Yes, Patsy recognized him instantly—but with an unexpected discovery and a thrill that went through him like an electric shock from head to foot.

For the figure with which he had collided, that he had seized in his arms to prevent a fall, that at once began to struggle to free itself from his involuntary embrace, was not the figure of a man.

It was the supple, yielding figure of—a woman!

Patsy guessed the truth on the instant. There was no need for explanations. He knew, now, why Nancy Nordeck had distrusted her master's visitor, why she felt sure that she had seen him before, and why he had involuntarily betrayed his recognition of her when she first admitted him to the Darling residence.

It was a discovery that clinched all of Nick Carter's suspicions. For Patsy now plainly recognized the cleverly disguised face. It told him on the instant that Philip Floyd and Kate Crandall were one and the same.

The recognition was mutual, moreover, and a half-smothered oath broke from the lips of the dismayed woman.

"Let me go!" she hissed, struggling viciously. "Let me go, I say!"

"Not much!" muttered Patsy exultantly. "I know you, now, and I've got you for keeps."

His arms closed more tightly around her. He had seized her, by chance, so that her arms were confined to her sides and she could not free them, could not use them to scratch and tear him, as she fain would have done.

But she writhed from side to side like an eel in his powerful grasp, her eyes glowing like balls of fire, her breath coming in quick, sharp gasps and falling hot on Patsy's cheeks.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she repeated in fierce, frantic whispers. "Curse you, let me go!"

"Not by a jugful," said Patsy. "I know you now. You're Kate Crandall."

"Let me go!"

"You'll go, all right—but you'll go with me."

"You devil! You—"

"Oh, cut out your struggling. You can't get away," Patsy interrupted, though content to let her exhaust herself with her furious efforts. "I've got you and I'm going to hold you."

"I'll kill —"

"Here, none of that! You'll be roughly handled if you try to pull a gun."

Patsy had felt her working one hand behind her to reach a hip pocket. He seized her wrist and held her closer, almost crushing her in his embrace; for not for an instant had she ceased her fierce, frantic struggles, and she was possessed of more than ordinary womanly strength and was giving him quite a battle.

She muttered a vicious oath again when foiled in her attempt to draw a weapon. Then, while they still swayed to and fro in the narrow entry, she took another course. She suddenly bowed her head and tried to set her teeth in Patsy's neck.

Patsy expected no less. He forced her quickly away, then swung her around, to crowd her against a wall, rendered a bit impatient by her fury, and now determined to handcuff her and end her struggles.

Instead of forcing her against the wall, however, Patsy forced her against the only door in the narrow side entry—the rear door of her own suite.

It was an unfortunate move on his part. The struggle was now heard from within. The door was suddenly opened—by the man whom Danny had seen with Kate Crandall that afternoon.

All this proved disastrous for Patsy Garvan. He partly lost his balance when the door opened, and he fell against the casing.

A gasp of relief came from the woman, and then a fierce cry.

"Down him! Down him, Jim, for God's sake!"

Dacey needed no bidding. He had guessed the truth upon hearing the noise of the struggle. He had drawn a weapon while approaching the door—the same weapon that felled Nick Carter a quarter hour later.

It fell like a flash when Patsy reeled against the casing, and while the frantic appeal was still on the woman's lips.

The sandbag caught Patsy squarely on the head, dropping him as it dropped Nick a little later. Without a groan, even, he sank in a crimped and senseless heap on the threshold of the door.

It was a brutal blow, dealt by the hand of a brutal man. It was this man who had been smoking a cigarette in Kate Crandall's suite just before the arrival of Nick Carter, but who had stolen into the rear entry before the detective entered, returning after his departure. Safely enough, indeed, the woman had given Nick permission to search her apartments.

"Quick!" she now said curtly. "Drag him in here, Jim!"

"Do you know him?" questioned Dacey, hastening to obey.

"Know him—I should say so!" snapped Kate. "He's one of Carter's assistants. His name is Garvan."

"The devil!" Dacey exclaimed. "Things are looking bad."

"We can right them, or get what's coming to us, at least," Kate hurriedly replied. "Come what may, Jim, these dicks will have nothing on us. We must save off arrest and exposure, however, if possible. Cut one of the window cords and bind this whelp."

Dacey hastened to do so, asking, in the meantime:

"How did you run foul of him?"

"We met in the entry."

"What was he doing there?"

"Give it up," said Kate tersely. "There must be more doing than we have suspected. There is only one course for us, Jim, until we can land the coin."

"What's that?"

"We must get Nick Carter, also, if he has gone to Sheldon's suite, as I suspect," Kate hurriedly explained. "We must get away with both of these dicks and hold them at your place until we can bring Sheldon to our terms. There's nothing else to it."

"Can it be done?" questioned Dacey doubtfully.

"It must be done," Kate insisted. "Is Moran in the side street with your limousine?"

"Yes."

"Open the window. Whistle him up here. He will aid us."

"Surest thing you know," cried Dacey, darting to the window.

"Note me, Jim, and follow my instructions," Kate quickly added. "I'll go at once to Sheldon's suite, as planned, and find out whether Carter is there."

"I get you."

"If he is, and appears likely to give us further trouble, I'll hold him up with a gun in about ten minutes. In the meantime, with Martin Moran to aid, gag this whelp and tie his hands together. Then steal into Sheldon's suite through the rear door. He left it unlocked for me."

"I'm on," Dacey nodded.

"Come quietly, mind you, and be ready to lend me a hand," Kate directed. "If we can get away with Carter and this fellow and confine them in your crib, we'll jump this house and remain at your place until we can bring Sheldon to his milk. He'll be so rattled up by this turn of affairs, that I think he will weaken."

"But how—"

"I'll explain later," Kate interrupted. "There is no time at present: I must hike to Sheldon's suite, in case Carter is already there. Follow me with Moran as soon as possible. The rear door, mind you. I must go round to the front."

"I understand," Dacey replied. "But how can we get them out of the house?"

"There's a lift for trunks and merchandise just beyond the back stairs," Kate hurriedly explained. "We can use it without being detected. We'll lower them both down and get away with them in your car. It can be done, all right. Take my word for that."

"Your word goes with me, Kate," Dacey declared significantly. "Be off, then, to Sheldon's suite. I'll be on hand with Moran in less than ten minutes."

As already has appeared, Jim Dacey proved to be as good as his word.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THIRD STRING.

Chick Carter was not idle while Nick Carter and Patsy Carvan were engaged as described. Chick had, of course, a very good description of the man whose identity he had undertaken to discover, and it soon proved sufficient for his need. For the man had been a frequent visitor to the apartments of Kate Crandall, and he was quite well known by Tom Carson, the clerk, with whom Chick had a confidential interview soon after entering the house.

"Know him—sure!" Carson declared, after Chick had introduced himself and stated his mission. "That description fits just one man to a nicety. His name is Jim Dacey."

"Capital!" said Chick earnestly. "Jim Dacey, eh? What do you know about him, Mr. Carson?"

"Well, nothing very bad, Mr. Carter, nor so good that he'll be sought for a Sunday-school superintendent," laughed the clerk. "He's a man about town and a good deal of a rouser."

"Is he in business?"

"I don't think so."

"What does he do for a living?"

"Anything that comes his way, I guess, or anybody. He

must have means enough to sport on in a quiet way; and I think he gambles frequently when he finds an easy game. I can't put you wise to much more."

"Is he quite friendly with the Crandall woman?" Chick inquired.

"He certainly is," said Carson.

"How long has she been living here?"

"About two months."

"What's her reputation?"

"None too good. She's pretty fly, I reckon, if the whole truth were told. We have been thinking of asking her to move out. That tells the story."

"Quite right," Chick replied. "Do you know where Jim Dacey lives?"

"Not exactly," said Carson. "But you can easily find out."

"How so?"

"Go out and question Tony Hogan. He has a taxicab stand around the corner. He has frequently taken Dacey home from here. He can tell you more about the man and just where he lives."

"Thanks," said Chick approvingly. "Not a word about this to others, mind you."

"Trust me, Carter. I'm dumb."

"You haven't seen Dacey this evening?"

"No, not since yesterday."

There was a very good reason for it. Leaving his limousine in the side street in charge of his chauffeur, Martin Moran, who was a bird of the same shady feather, Jim Dacey had entered the side door of the house when he went up to Kate Crandall's apartments.

Chick thanked Carson again and repaired to the street. He soon found the man he was seeking, a shrewd, keen-eyed Irishman, who already knew Chick by sight and reputation. Hogan needed only a hint from the detective, moreover, to cut loose and tell all that he knew about Dacey.

But Chick soon found that Hogan could add but little definite information to that already obtained, which of itself was quite sufficient to convince Chick that he was on the right track. This was further confirmed by the fact that Dacey dwelt in a somewhat isolated place, that was less than a mile from the Darling residence, where he employed only a deaf housekeeper and the chauffeur already mentioned.

Chick paused only briefly to determine what course he would take.

"Nick and Patsy can look after things here," he said to himself. "They will not need me. There is a bare possibility, on the other hand, that Darling is in the clutches of this bunch of blacklegs, as Nick suspects, and that he is confined at the Dacey place. I'll go out there and look it over, at all events, and communicate later with Nick."

Then, turning to the cabman, he said abruptly:

"Take me out there, Hogan, and drop me a couple of hundred yards from the place. I'll decide later whether I have further use for you."

"That's good enough for me, Mr. Carter," Hogan said readily. "Tumble in, sir."

Less than half an hour brought them to their destination, a crossroad from which could be seen, in the near distance, quite an old wooden dwelling half hidden amid the trees flanking one side of the narrower road. It could be discerned only dimly in the starlight, though some

lighted lower windows could be plainly seen through the trees. It was the only dwelling in the immediate locality, and Chick came to a quick conclusion.

"Drive on about a quarter mile, Hogan, and wait till I come," he directed. "I cannot say just how long you may have to wait."

"My time is yours, Mr. Carter," said Hogan. "You'll find me there when you come."

"Good enough," said Chick. "You'll get all that's coming to you."

"I know I can bank on that, sir."

Chick waited until the taxicab had disappeared around a curve in the main road. He then followed the other for a short distance, presently vaulting a low wall and crossing a strip of rough land, from which he could steal into the grounds at one side of the Dacey dwelling.

They were unattractive in appearance, denoting that the owner was far from being a man of means. Chick sized them up correctly, and was about to steal nearer the house to peer through one of the windows, when the side door was opened and a woman appeared in the lighted hall. She lingered briefly, gazing out toward the road, and then closed the door and vanished.

"The deaf housekeeper," thought Chick, who had easily seen her tall, gaunt figure. "She is evidently expecting some one, probably Dacey himself. There would be lights in more than that one room if he were at home. By Jove, if she is as deaf as Hogan stated, and also is alone there, I can easily enter unheard through one of the windows and search the house from cellar to roof. I could find Darling, all right, if he is confined there."

Not yet convinced that Dacey was absent, however, Chick still proceeded cautiously, approaching one of the lighted windows on all fours, then stealthily rising to peer between the curtain and the casing.

He could see part of a cheaply furnished sitting room. An oil lamp burned on the table. The housekeeper was seated near by, absorbed in reading a newspaper. It was half past nine by a small oak clock on the mantel.

Chick watched the woman for a few moments, then gently tapped once on the windowpane. The woman did not stir. Chick tapped louder, then knocked quite sharply, but the sounds brought no sign from the reading woman.

"As deaf as a hitching post," thought Chick. "I'll force a window in the opposite side of the house. She might detect the chill of the night air, if I were to open a door."

Stealing around the house, Chick selected the side window of a front room, then shrouded in darkness. Thrusting his knife blade between the sashes, he easily forced the lock aside and was about to lift the lower section, when a flash of light deterred him.

He saw it again in a moment. It flashed between the trees in the distance. It came from the lamps of an automobile running at high speed over the main road. Suddenly it diverged and a steady glare fell upon the road approaching Dacey's place.

"By Jove, it may be coming here," Chick muttered, watching. "Dacey is returning, perhaps, just in time to prevent my search. Yes, by thunder, I am right—it is coming here."

The car was slowing down. The outlines of a limousine now could be seen. It swerved into a driveway approaching the house—and Chick dropped flat on the ground,

close to the foundation wall, lest he might be seen in the glare of the headlights.

He now saw that there were several men in the car, but he could not distinguish their faces. The number surprised him.

"Great Scott! there are six, at least," he said to himself. "I'm up against more of a gang than I expected. Where the deuce are they going?"

The car had passed a side door and was rounding a rear corner of the house. Chick crept out from his concealment far enough to see that it had stopped directly back of the dwelling. Presently, too, he saw four of the men alighting—for he naturally supposed that all of them were men.

One of them hastened to open a bulkhead door leading into the cellar. The chauffeur extinguished the lights of the car. Then a cry came from Dacey, as he returned from the cellar with a lighted lantern.

"All ready for them, Martin," he said curtly. "Lend a hand, Sheldon. You stand aside, Floyd, and hold this lantern; we can lift them out and lug them into the cellar. We'll lock them in the laundry till we have settled this business. I'll send Sarah to bed, though she's as deaf as an adder."

"Would she squeal, Jim, if she knew?" questioned Kate Crandall.

"Never a squeal," Dacey declared. "But she's best out of the way, for all that."

"By Jove, that was a woman's voice, as sure as I'm over seven," thought Chick, when he heard Kate's question. "A woman in male attire, eh? Great guns! I begin to scent the rat in the meal. This bunch of rascals have in some way got the best of Nick and Patsy. But there still is a third string to the chief's bow. It's always safe to bank on one of us."

Chick had not long to wait for his suspicion to be confirmed. He saw Nick and Patsy lifted from the limousine and carried into the cellar, both conscious then, but gagged and securely bound, and Chick stole quickly back to the window he had unlocked.

"I'll get into the house while the coast is clear," he said to himself. "I'll find out what business is to be settled by these rascals. Then I'll settle them and their business—or know the reason why!"

Noiselessly lifting the window, Chick crept over the sill and stood in a gloomy front parlor, reclosing the window and locking it. There he paused for a moment, listening. He could hear the men inside, the muffled sound of their voices, and the bang of a closed door.

"The bulkhead door, or that of the laundry," he muttered. "Got Nick and Patsy, eh? I must contrive to liberate them. I'll try to locate the cellar stairs."

Chick did not find it difficult to do so. He tiptoed to the door leading into the hall, which ran straight through the house to a rear door and the kitchen. It was lighted only by a feeble oil lamp and the glow that came through the open door of the sitting room.

Pausing, Chick peered cautiously in that direction—then quickly drew back.

A door near the main stairway was suddenly opened.

Jim Dacey had come up from the cellar and was striding through the dimly lighted hall.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INNER WHEEL.

Chick Carter stepped back of the parlor door and peered between it and the casing, shifting a revolver to his side pocket.

Jim Carter turned abruptly, however, and entered the sitting room.

Chick heard him shout to the deaf housekeeper and order her to go to bed. She came out with a lamp in a few moments, and Chick saw her disappear up a back stairway.

She scarce had vanished when Floyd, or Kate Crandall, still in male attire, came through the cellar doorway and was joined in the hall by Dacey, who asked abruptly, with a look of grim misgivings:

"Where is Sheldon? What's turned him so sour and

"Cut it!" Kate sharply whispered, audible to Chick. "He must not hear us. I have something to say to you. I have ordered him to watch the laundry door till Moran returns."

"Where has he gone?"

"To house the car. He'll not show up for several minutes. That will give me time to explain."

"Explain what?"

"Come into the sitting room. I'll soon tell you."

"You'll tell me, also, you jade, and I'll wager I will make the most of it," thought Chick, watching the couple enter the room and noting that they only partly closed the door. "Unless I am much mistaken, by Jove, I shall now get the key to the whole mystery."

Chick lingered only a moment, then stole into the hall and found concealment under the rise of the main stairway. That brought him within ten feet of the sitting-room door, and within easy view of that opening upon the landing at the head of the cellar stairs. He scarce had concealed himself in the dark corner he had selected, when he made another discovery.

The cellar door was slowly swinging open. A stealthy hand was cautiously moving it. Presently, not only the hand, but the spy himself could be seen. He was crouching on the landing, his head thrust forward, his ears strained, his eyes glowing like those of a cornered wolf. "Sheldon!" thought Chick, startled by the terrible look on the man's face. "By Jove, I'm not alone. He, too, wants to learn what this vixen has up her sleeve."

Sheldon, having reached the vantage point desired, did not stir from his crouching posture on the landing.

Chick waited and listened.

Kate Crandall's voice, though somewhat subdued, could be distinctly heard by both.

"I can tell you in a nutshell, Jim, just where we stand and what must be done," she was saying earnestly. "Our easy mark has ceased to be an easy mark. He has become suspicious. He begins to feel sure that I am in love with you, instead of with him, and that I intend to throw him down. That's why he has balked at making over half of his fortune to me, and at putting it in my hands before I marry him. That's what has kept us hung up in the Ashburton Chambers for a whole week since the supposed suicide."

"By thunder!" Chick mentally exclaimed. "Supposed suicide? Easy mark, eh? This man Sheldon must be Cyrus Darling, then, as sure as there is juice in a lemon."

Chick needed only one glance at the face of the crouching man to convince him that he was right.

"I know all that, Kate," Dacey responded, with a growl. "But what's the answer? What's to be done?"

"We must blind him still farther and contrive to get his coin. That done, we must get rid of him and bolt for Europe."

"Get rid of him?"

"Exactly."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen!" Kate Crandall's voice took on more vicious accents. "He has turned all of his fortune into cash and has it in a deposit drawer downtown."

"Well?"

"Providing I will marry him and go with him to live in Europe, he will get the bundle of money from the safety deposit in order to take it with us."

"Well?" Dacey repeated grimly.

"Here, now, is the point," Kate went on. "The Carters have us hard pressed, but they do not yet suspect that Sheldon and Cyrus Darling are one and the same."

"Surely not."

"They are the only persons on earth who really believe that Darling is alive. No one else suspects it, even."

"Surely not," Dacey again repeated.

"If we were to kill him, then, and get rid of his body, who the devil would ever suspect the crime? Only the Carters! But they could not prove anything. They could not even show that Darling did not kill himself. He's as good as dead already, as far as that goes, and they can never learn where Moran got the body that was substituted for Darling at the time of the supposed suicide."

"By Heaven, Kate, you've got all the makings of a devil in you," said Dacey, with a growl.

"I'm only showing you the way," Kate Crandall replied. "It can be done easily enough. It's the only way by which we can make Darling produce the coin."

"What's your plan?"

"We'll keep Carter and Garvan here till the trick is turned. We'll fake a marriage ceremony with Darling. That done and his money on his person, we'll end him forever and bolt with the coin."

"I see," Dacey nodded.

"When Carter and Garvan are liberated, they'll have only a guess coming to them," Kate added. "They cannot prove that Floyd and I were one. They cannot show that Sheldon and Darling were one. All they can do, Jim, will be to look wise and guess at the whole business. It can be done like breaking sticks. What do you say?"

"Kill Darling, eh?" queried Dacey.

"Why not? There is no risk. He's dead already—in the eye of the law."

"That's true."

"We surely can turn the trick and get away without serious suspicion."

"It does look so, Kate, I'll admit," Dacey thoughtfully agreed.

How this enterprising colloquy would have ended, and at what final conclusion the plotters would have arrived, will never be known in this world.

Chick Carter, glancing at the crouching man, saw him withdraw from his position and cautiously descend the cellar stairs.

Chick suspected a genuine suicide, and he stole quickly

from his concealment and noiselessly followed him. When part way down the stairs, he again discovered his man.

Sheldon was tearing the disguise from his face in frantic haste, and was casting it fiercely upon the floor.

Chick waited and watched him.

The disguise removed, revealing a weak-featured man of forty, Darling hastened to open the door of the laundry, into which he vanished.

Chick crept down the stairs and to the open door.

Darling was hurriedly cutting the bonds from Nick and Patsy, at the same time crying in nervous, frantic, agonized whispers:

"Enough of this—enough of it! I'm going to confess; going to tell the whole truth. I've been a blinded, cursed fool, an infernal madman, crazed with love for an unscrupulous woman. I am Cyrus Darling—Cyrus Darling himself. I'll tell the whole truth and take my medicine. Come with me, Mr. Carter. Come with me, for God's sake, and arrest that she-devil and her knavish confederate. Come with me and—"

"Hush!"

Nick calmly interrupted him. He then was free and on his feet, as was Patsy. He saw Chick entering the room, also; and he knew that the case was precisely what he had asserted, that of a man with a lost head, and that the finish was but the work of moments.

Nick waited only to hear Chick's statement.

Half a minute later, still engaged in discussing their devilish plot, Dacey and Kate Crandall beheld the three detectives and the undisguised man enter the sitting room. Both instantly guessed the truth, and while Dacey weakened perceptibly, only a loud laugh came from the woman.

"Oh, it's all off, then," she cried, with mingled disgust and defiance. "You have called the turn on us, Carter, have you?"

"You'll find that I have," Nick replied.

"Oh, well, that don't rattle me any," Kate sharply asserted. "You have got nothing on us, Carter. I told you I never would lay myself liable. Any man may pretend to commit suicide, if he wants to, and turn all of his fortune into cash. The more fool he, in that case, and he's the one who must pay the price. You've got nothing on us, Carter, and well you know it. Otherwise, you'd have had us in irons by this time."

Nick Carter knew that there was some truth in this, yet he said sternly:

"Don't you be so sure of it, Kate Crandall. I can send you up for a term of years for conspiracy, abduction, and opposing officers of the law. If I don't do so—there will be but one reason," he added pointedly.

"What reason is that?" Kate demanded, with color fading.

"You have made an infernal fool of this man, and he knows it, now. I think he will behave himself in the future, and I'm going to give him a chance. I shall do so for the sake of his wife, who is as fine a woman as you are the reverse. I shall invent a story to account for all that has occurred, and shall send Cyrus Darling home to his wife. Neither she nor the public must know the truth. Your only hope, Kate Crandall, and that of your confederates, lies in your permanent secrecy."

"I agree to that, Carter," cried Kate quickly. "The truth shall never be told."

"Does that go with you, Dacey?" Nick sternly demanded.

"You bet!" Dacey eagerly cried.

"And you will silence Moran?"

"Silence him? You bet I'll silence him—if I have to cut his tongue out."

Nick turned to Cyrus Darling, who had sunk upon the nearest chair, with his head bowed in his hands.

What Nick said to the erring man is of minor importance. It is enough to add that he adjusted the matter in the manner suggested; that Cyrus Darling returned home a few days later with a story that Nick had invented for him, and that the real truth was, indeed, never disclosed.

THE END.

Two convictions on Nick's part, however, were verified later. One that Cyrus Darling thereafter would be a man. The other, that Nick had not seen the last of Kate Crandall. You will read about the verification of these two convictions in the story that you will find in the next issue of this weekly, No. 123, out January 16th, entitled "Half a Million Ransom; or, Nick Carter and the Needy Nine."

RUBY LIGHT.

By BURKE JENKINS.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 120 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER VII.

A DASH IN THE DARK.

I enjoyed that ride into the darkness that was, by now, fast settling over Casco Bay; at least, I relished the first part of it. And it was in momentary forgetfulness of my dislike of my companion that I said cheerfully:

"Somethin' like, eh?"

"Uh!" grunted Pawlinson; and I resolved to make no further overtures.

Some more minutes elapsed in this dark dash—straight away we were making it, and we flew no lights. Then Pawlinson swirled us to a tangent.

"You're not going past Orr's Island, then?" I cried; but I might have saved my breath for all the attention he paid me.

Perhaps three more minutes it was that we ran thus. Then he whirled on me with a short:

"Off!" I was bewildered, for speed had certainly been the desideratum up to now.

"Off, I said!" he ripped out vexedly. "I'm giving orders here, remember."

I threw out the switch, and we slumped down to, wabbling in the light seat that was running.

Even in the gloom I could see his features working. Then I followed his gaze out over the water toward where Peak's Island showed darker against the night sky.

And more showed in that direction than that; for two trim masts were swaying slightly against the starred background.

"The schooner!" said I.

"Right—for once." Pawlinson came out of his silence. "And now maybe you can see why I didn't run right past the island, eh?"

"But surely speed boats are plentiful enough nowadays."

I answered, "There couldn't have been much to arouse suspicion, even if we had shot directly alongside. The lad said it was shortest."

"It's easy to see you don't know Carl Stroth. Look!" The steady, bright-eyed glare of a powerful searchlight ate into the night. It came from the schooner's fore crossrees.

"Get it through your noddle at last?"

"Yes," said I humbly enough.

For some minutes the searchlight played over the waters; but it was noticeable that it confined its attention to a small arc; and that arc, fortunately or unfortunately, did not include that portion of the bay where lay our inert, low-lying craft.

But its radiance suddenly found and rested upon something well ahead of us—a something that made both Pawlinson and myself let out an oath.

"The police launch!"

"But it's headed back to town from Trawly's Rock!" I cried.

"Well, and why not?" he snapped. "Even a policeman can sometimes fall to the fact that there's such a thing in this world as a bunk."

"You think, then," said I, "that they have found out the wire was bogus?"

"I think that when they got out to that desolate chunk of rock and didn't find me there, that possibly something like that did enter their heads."

"But—"

"But Stroth is right this minute chuckling happily; for by the time that launch gets back to headquarters for new orders, he'll be hull down, scaward."

"But he's waiting for that gasoline."

"Oh, he is, is he? Take a squirt at the schooner again, and see if he'll have to wait long."

Much as I hated the fellow, I couldn't but admire his perception. I followed his pointing, and discerned that a small lighter had been brought alongside the vessel, and, by the light of the lanterns that had been hung to the rigging at the rail, I could see men transferring barrel after barrel to the schooner's hold.

"The gasoline!" I cried.

"Probably," came the reply.

"Then Hallins' man who got aboard to-day was wrong as to the time they could get it?"

"I have known mistakes, such slight ones, to be made before," snarled Pawlinson.

"But we can beat 'em to it yet," I said, with enthusiasm.

"How? What are you driving at?"

"There's a good twenty-five-mile-an-hour gait bottled up in this little tube," I explained. "And here we are in a triangle. The police launch is headed cityward, but ahead of us, eh?"

"Right enough."

"Then out there lies the schooner at another corner of the triangle, and to our port side."

"Right again," Pawlinson's sarcasm was, for the moment, absent.

"I take it you are planning force from the first. You asked as to my gun, you know."

"Yes, yes. Go ahead, man!"

"Then," I cried, "what's the matter with us uncorking every bit of ginger there is in this hydro—shoot

past the schooner—overtake the patrol launch—give 'em the news, and—"

"You think we could make it before Stroth'd get wise? He's got a good engine himself, remember; and, should he tumble, he'd have a head start on the launch."

"But, being auxiliary," I interrupted, frantic for action, "he is bound to be as much slower than the police boat than it is to our hydro. Besides, he's not to up-anchor or cut. It'll work!" I cried enthusiastically as I fished in my pocket for my jackknife and turned back quickly toward the traffrail.

"Here, what're you up to?" snapped Pawlinson.

"Why, we've got to cast that blamed punt adrift now," I answered sharply. "We've got to be clear of everything."

Ice came into the voice that met my warmth.

"Start the engine. We'll keep the punt."

"But, man—"

"Start the engine."

There was that in Pawlinson I've met in few men; for I had that machine barking the next instant—and I'm not an oversweet-tempered individual myself, as I have intimated.

I threw in the clutch, and we fairly jumped out of the water when she began to "plane."

There was no shunning the island now on Pawlinson's part.

Instead, he headed almost directly for it. I cannot that was calculated to bring us within a furlong of the anchored schooner on our way to intercept the patrol launch, which was pointed, as near as we could judge, directly cityward.

The exact angle was a thing of estimation to a nicety; but, with the speed we were soon attaining, it certainly looked as if it would work.

The wind had fallen flat, as it often does between the day and night breeze, and this helped. So we cut a swath of boiling spume over an unrippled mirror which heaved only to a slight swell.

"Now, man," Pawlinson let me into his thoughts, "once clear of the schooner's stern, and we've got 'em; no matter which way the cat jumps."

"Yes," I agreed enthusiastically. "By that time they wouldn't have a chance to clear before we'd have the patrol launch veered for her."

"And now for it!" His tone was calm and collected enough; but I read temerity in it, nevertheless.

As for myself, I was fairly rigid with the moment, for it was the crucial one. We were about to pass the schooner.

Then came the sickening disgust.

Out from the fore crossrees blazed the white glare of the searchlight again.

This time were were in for it. The rattling exhaust of our engine had told its story; or, at least, it had told enough to excite sufficient curiosity for a look at us.

The light oscillated once or twice in search; then it steadied, and our eyes blinked in its glare. Everything about us sprang into daylight, and the brass cylinder heads before me fairly glittered.

I imagined I could hear the wielder of the light chuckle at his find; but I didn't have to imagine the imprecation that Pawlinson hissed venomously. I have seldom heard such fervor; but I seconded it heartily.

"All up!" I groaned; for it took no clairvoyant to fathom that the alarm had been sounded.

Even above the sound of our engine we heard a sharp command given, and the lines were cast from the lighter alongside. Then came some quick blows on metal.

"Make that out?" queried Pawlinson shortly.

"Cutting the cable," I muttered. "They know the game. Her engine's going already. Where's the police boat?" "The fools in her smell something up; but, being fools, they've stopped to see what it is."

Sure enough, off there about a quarter mile, the lights of the patrol stood fixed, showing that either her engine had been shut off or was running free from load.

"At any rate," I growled, "she's too far off to help, anyway. That schooner's certainly fast under power. Once started, she's a good match for the launch, and besides—"

"Stop the engine!"

I whirled in amazement at the deadly animosity that came into Pawlinson's voice; and the searchlight—which had kept us steadily in its radiance—showed a countenance an equal match to the tone. Then a smile came over his face as he corrected:

"Throw her into the neutral!"

I did so, and our screw stopped.

"Now, haul up that punt's painter and get into the tub."

"Get into the punt?" I cried, mystified.

"Into the punt, I said, didn't I?" shrielled the man with me. I can scarcely call him Pawlinson. I have never seen rage mount much higher as he busied himself setting the steering wheel to a certain spoke. The gear was a good one, and would hold to any setting of rudder.

"But why?" I ventured further; then regretted the words, and forthwith did as he had ordered.

I brought the punt alongside, sprang into it, and stood steadying, awaiting what would come next.

But I snatched a second for a peek over my shoulder.

The schooner was almost upon us by now; for, of course, she was headed for the nearest way out of the bay; and that way happened to be our way.

But I was brought sharply back to Pawlinson.

"And now," said he, "I think we've got something that'll work."

As he said this, he, too, clambered from the speed boat into the punt along with me.

Now, mind you, the engine was still running in the neutral.

"Reach over there!" he ordered. "Full speed ahead! You can reach the lever from where you stand. You know best how to do it. You start her, and the rudder'll do the rest."

Then it was, on that very instant, that there flashed over me a light of understanding as brilliant as the calcium that still played about us.

"You don't mean it, man?" I cried; for I remembered now the strong metal stringers of the hydroplane's structure; the weight of her engine; the impact that it meant at a twenty-five-mile-an-hour clip. The boat lay low in the water; and the hole she'd make in that yacht-planked schooner would be well along, and even below the water line.

"I do mean it!" he yelled. "And now's the time! About amidsthips she'll catch it, I think. We'll watch it from the punt."

I felt myself boil as would any civilized man.

"And I, think not!" The words sounded as from some other throat than my own. "Sink that schooner with all the men in her, and——"

"And what?" I could feel his breath hot with wrath as he brought his face pugnaciously close to mine.

"The girl!" I cried.

"What do you know about her?"

"Enough to know that I'll not——"

I don't remember the end of that sentence; for he suddenly whirled his broad back upon me, and, fending my interference off thus, reached over into the speed boat's cockpit and threw back the starting lever.

But the steering wheel was aft, a side steerer attached to the coaming—the port coaming at that, and right to my hand.

I grabbed that wheel, and flung it around desperately, in the second I had before the hydroplane shot from us.

She didn't veer far from her course of intended destruction; but it was enough, and I had the inner glow of satisfaction for the one instant that was allowed me before I met him as he turned and gripped me in deadly embrace.

In an iron clutch I felt myself borne bodily aloft. I struck the water breathless, and I cannot swim.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN STRANGE QUARTERS.

I have my own theory as to just what becomes of us when we—the real, thinking we, that is—enter that somewhat uncanny realm which men have agreed to let ignorance call unconsciousness. But this is neither the time nor place to air it.

Sufficient to state, now, that from the moment I felt the chill of the waters of the bay, and strangled in its brine, I knew nothing of what we name actuality until I was sensible of an easy, steady sway of body as I was rocked cradlewise.

A distinctly delicious semiconsciousness made me forget a decided stiffness and cramp of muscle, and it was with reluctance that I opened a tentative eye.

I am not ordinarily one of those who jump up immediately upon waking, anyway.

And slowly it was that the nature of my surroundings came to me.

A faint swish directly beside the bunk whereon I found I was lying proved to come from a hung-up suit of Cape Ann oilskins; and a further exploring peek beyond revealed several rows of bunks like my own.

A ladder of steep incline, topped by a hatch; a semi-circle of seat lockers; tar in the air, and a faint reek of bilge—the combination ended all conjecture.

A hearty chuckle from directly alongside my head made me up-on-elbow for a nearer scan of the chuckler.

I have never seen a bundle of more jovial rotundity, or a larger. A perfect giant of a man he was, with good nature popping from him. And a sailor he was to the gnarled crooks of his "fishhook" fingers, which at this moment were ramming home a husky charge of palm-rolled cut plug into a broken-stemmed "ha'penny clay."

"Ho, ho!" he bumbled when he saw that I had caught sight of him. "An' where away now, m' bucko?"

I passed a hand over my features, and my question was trite enough:

"Where am I?"

Again merriment rippled in folds up and down him as he replied:

"On board the *Ruby Light*, m' lad, and a better vessel's keel was never laid!"

"*Ruby Light*?" I echoed hesitatingly, for a bit of mistiness still held me. "Why, I thought—that is——"

"That is," he rumbled gleefully, "this here's about the last place you expected ter come ter life in. An' mebbe it are jest about the last place you'd 'a' picked out. He, he! Shouldn't wonder, m' lad, shouldn't wonder!" And he drifted off into a falsetto titter.

But there certainly was no malice in his merriment; it seemed rather to make me a comrade.

"But how in thunder did I get here?" My voice was putting on more heartiness. "And who——"

"Hold on, -slow Billy-boy! One at a time, and slow," he chided. "As to the how and the who, why—I m'self was the who; an' a good long, boat hook was the how. Managed ter ketch under the belt as you slid by our quarter during said episode last night. An', by time, boy, you were heavien'r you look, shore!"

"But what I should like to know is, why——"

"An' that that's just what I'm going ter pass up ter superiors. Orders is orders, y' know, matie; an' I shore am some strong when it comes to 'em. But I tell you what I can do an' it ought to sound like screeching good news; I can tumble a cup o' b'iling hot coffee into you. Eh, what? A mug along 'ith some salt horse?"

"Sounds good to me!" I strove to echo his strain, as I threw my legs over the side of the bunk. "But how about my clothes?" For the first time I realized that I was wearing nothing but a coarse, sailor's blue flannel shirt.

"Right t' hand, an' bone dry!" he chortled, as he edged his huge bulk through a narrow opening, beyond which I caught the glow of a small "shipmate" range.

Next instant he reappeared with my clothes over his arm.

"Did m' best, laddie, ter get 'em into some sort o' shape. Kind o' draggled they 'was, as is natural. An' the shoes are durned stiff, believe me. But they'll come around——"

"Well, I should say!" said I, delighted to get into my own togs, "and I don't see how you managed to get 'em as good as you did."

The old fellow had actually made a pretense of pressing the trousers, though truth compels me to say that he had run the seams decidedly awry.

I was surprised to see how weak I was, for, even though there was scarcely any sea running, I lurched abominably as I put on my trousers.

"Coffee's in order!" he announced, and once more sought the range.

Two minutes after I had drained that mug and chewed off some chunks of "junk," and I was still doing business at the old stand.

"And now," said I, "next?"

"Well," came the hearty response, "seem's I'm the doctor, why, I jest says the deck for yourn. Besides, them's the orders."

Before I mounted the ladder I stood before the old fellow, and put out my hand.

"My name's Tom Grey," said I, "and somehow I'm not much when it comes to thanks; but——"

"Aw, shucks!" he roared back at me, as he fairly enveloped my hand with his big paw. "Nawthin' 'tall! Kind o' fun, 'twas, fishin' you out thataway! Besides, I warn't doing nothin' but obein' orders; an' as mebbe I've before let out, I'm quite some when it comes t' orders. Yep! Why, any o' the lads on deck'll second the motion that old Steve, bos'n o' this here *Ruby Light*, jest eats 'em—orders, that is. Now, tumble out and mind your eye, matie. Me fer a cat nap."

Whereupon he rolled into the bunk I had quitted.

CHAPTER IX.

A PLEASURE TRIP.

It was fully fifteen minutes after I gained the deck before the slightest attention was paid to my appearance, and this period I made full use of in close scrutiny of my surroundings.

Never, even aboard a man-of-war, have I seen such decks. Holystoned they were, every inch of them, and at that very instant four fellows were scouring away for dear life.

And that immaculateness was everywhere apparent. I could see well enough why it was that I had awakened alone in the forecabin with only old Steve to watch over me.

Brass shone to brisk burnishing; mahogany glowed to the chamois; every man jack of 'em was furbishing, except the helmsman.

And the craft was well worth such grooming. Even in the anxiety that, of necessity, was mine at the moment, I glowed over such fitness; everything O. K. to the dot. Bowsprit to taffrail I scanned her, and didn't find an "out." Her forestay she carried pretty well in-board, for the 'sprit was short, according to the modern custom.

The masts, clear Oregon pine, raked a trifle, giving a dash that was a bit reminiscent of the old *America*. It may not make for speed, but I never saw a real sailor that didn't favor it.

Guessing the direction by the sun, I reckoned our course to be somewhat east of south, and the freshening west wind bellied the creamy canvas into unwrinkled corpulence. Besides her lower standing, she was carrying balloon and club topsail.

But no foretopsail met my upward search, and it didn't take long to see why. Between her masts stretched wire-less rigging.

Now, all this time of my survey of the schooner, not one of the full score of sailors that were working all about me, as I paced the forward deck, gave me a word. But I judged, from an occasional furtive glance or two I caught, that I was nothing if not interesting.

I suppose, though, as old Steve had intimated, "orders were orders." But that kind of thing gets on a man's nerves as only such inactive suspense can, and I was upon the very point of striding aft to stir up something when I spied some gilt emerging from the companionway.

The little captain gave a word to the man at the wheel, then whirled and faced forward.

"Stevens once more!" said I to myself, though I was not oversuprised at the recognition.

His grin when he caught sight of me was all the satisfaction I got before he popped immediately back down

the companionway. But I didn't have long to wait for further developments, for I don't believe it was a full minute before a little Jap glided up the steps, and came directly toward me.

"You come follow me," said the flunky abruptly, as he whirled a most ridiculous rightabout. But naturally I was in no mood to read humor in things, so I followed meekly enough.

The Jap led down the steps, and across a saloon; then he tapped almost reverently at a door that gave off from a passageway beyond.

To a sharp summons to enter, he opened the door, and stood aside for me to pass him, which I did. Then the door closed behind me, and I faced the strangest stateroom I ever saw.

But it was not the room itself, remarkable as it was, that focused the entire attention, for a man in a broad-backed chair, busied at something on the table before him, sat facing me.

The whole breadth of the room was between us, but I could feel every nerve of my ill-controlled features pass under the appraising scrutiny of that pair of half-closed gray eyes that drilled at me as he glanced up from what he was engrossing his attention.

It will be remembered that on the two occasions I had seen this man, Carl Stroth, I had not got a fair and square look at him. Back there on the launch at Port Washington he had stood steadily at the wheel, peering ahead, while I, of necessity, was busied with the engine.

And that other time when, as the accommodating "deck hand," he had made a fool of me, his disguise had been of the cleverest.

But now I had ample opportunity for a searching survey of the man, for he let a minute pass in silence. And I availed myself of this opportunity to the full; though now, as I attempted to word the impression his face made upon me, I am forced lamely to state that its strongest characteristic lay in its very indefinableness; a sort of haunting fitting of something I decidedly didn't like across features which seemed more naturally to fit themselves into something I instinctively did like.

Even seated as he was, there came to his shoulders suddenly that forward lurch which I had before noted, and which now I could see was accompanied by a forward craning of the neck in riveting his eyes upon me. Vulturelike it was, and more.

And then, as suddenly, the posture shifted to ease as he said quietly:

"None the worse for the episode, Mr. Grey?"

It was not so much surprise at his knowing my name—which I knew his methods well enough by now to see would be easy—as it was the lightness and even friendliness of the tone; a friendliness which consorted ill with the stare he had favored me with the moment before. But I strove to match it as I replied:

"It was more for adventure than money that I entered the detective service, Mr. Stroth."

I know now that nothing I could have said would have had more effect upon him, or quicker.

"Ah!" he cried delightedly, as he sprang to his feet, shoved back his chair, and strode toward me. "Good! There we have it—adventure—spice—zest! The only thing worth while, isn't it?"

It certainly was an unexpected way to open conver-

sation, under the circumstances; and, next second, he seemed to realize it, for his tone altered to one of less enthusiasm:

"But first it's probably best for us to understand each other."

He nodded for me to be seated, and resumed his own chair.

"Mr. Grey," said he, "who is, or was, your employer in this case?"

My smile was almost a wince at his shift of tense to the past; then I replied evasively:

"This case?"

"Come, now, man," he retorted sharply, and I regretted my attempt at fencing; "you look like more sense. And I believe, if you'll remember our several positions at the present minute, that probably out-and-out frankness will strike you as the best policy. It is natural that I am puzzled about you at some points in reviewing the events of the past two days; and I see no better or quicker method of clearing the air than direct question and answer. So now, what say you? Of course, I can handle my own end in either course you choose to pursue, though personally I prefer candor."

He was right; the upper hand was his, and it didn't take me many seconds to reconcile my conscience to my superior's, by saying:

"Let it be the truth, then, Mr. Stroth. And I certainly hope that something'll come out that will make things a bit clearer to me. The Lord knows I'm in the dark deep enough myself. I'm ready."

"First, then," said he, as he handed me over a humidior of dusky-hued panettas—though I noticed he didn't take one himself—"perhaps it would be best for me to state my difficulties, eh?"

"As you will, sir," I agreed, lighting the welcome cigar, which I really stood in need of.

"Here we have it, then," he continued. "First I see you on the dock at Port Washington, and it's the first time I ever saw you in my life, I believe."

"Exactly," I broke in, "and I believe I was at that time instrumental—was of some service?"

"Wait! That's just the point. You were of service, immense service, I admit. I never would have thought that Pawlinson would have the nerve to risk fooling Stevens into hiring him for engineer of my own launch. And it might very well have succeeded but for you, as you say."

"But then?"

"But next I stumble on you at the Portland wharf. Apparently your rôle had, by that time, decidedly shifted. Stevens, who came from Stamford, where he left the launch, even tells me that both you and Pawlinson traveled in the same sleeping coach with him to Boston."

"I didn't know it at the time," I said, but he paid no attention to the interruption as he concluded:

"And now, last night, came the final mystery, for my searchlight revealed both you and Pawlinson at fisticuff loggerheads in a wabbly punt, with a speed-boat accompaniment. As to your place in this little series of events, I confess myself completely mystified; and so it is that I ask you—who was your employer in this thing, and where do you stand, anyway?"

I saw no way to answer except in the strictest truth, and I couldn't see, for the life of me, how it could hurt matters at all then, for I certainly was completely in his

power any time he should choose to apply the thumb-screws.

"I am one of Chief Garth's men," said I. "You know him?"

"Old Garth, of the United?" he chuckled. "I should say I did. Yes?"

"Now, it was mere coincidence that made me figure back there at Port Washington. I didn't even know Pawlinson then."

"I have had enough whirls with coincidence to credit improbability on that score. Well?"

He was attention itself, and, had I resolved upon a lie, I might well have feared the brain behind those eyes. But truth is deliciously easy. So I continued quietly:

"So when I returned to Chief Garth's house that night I found that Pawlinson had asked him for a man upon a difficult case, and that——"

"Yes, yes. I've got you. The same case. Coincidence again, and, as I say, I believe you. You left Portland with what plan?"

"Simply to spot you," I replied. "You see, I read the steamer's name on the stern out there in the Sound when you boarded her. I knew her port, for I have sailed on her myself."

There was a short interval of silence, during which he fitted things together. Then he came out with:

"How Pawlinson followed you to Portland, made his authority known to you, and you worked together after your meeting there?"

"Exactly!"

"But come, finish it! What was the meaning of that disagreement between you alongside the hydroplane?"

"You didn't catch the motive, then?" I queried.

"Not at all. I was called to the deck only in time to see him lift you clear of the punt, and hurl you overboard. And," he added, with a smile, "old Steve's boat hook did the rest."

"So you haven't yet tumbled to the reason for quitting the speed boat?"

"No; though I did understand that there wasn't time for you to connect with the police launch."

"Well," said I, "granting a fiend's viewpoint, the plan was not so bad, for it certainly would have stopped you. That craft was built stancher than most hydroplanes, and carried a terrible way on her. She'd have made a nasty-enough hole——"

"What!" He sprang erect in the sudden mount of fury at the full realization. "Do you mean to tell me that the scoundrel actually meditated——"

"Not only meditated," I interrupted coolly. "He'd already ordered me to the punt, and set the rudder before I myself could——"

His tone lowered as he broke in on my explanation:

"So that was the reason for the fight?"

"Naturally," I replied. "Much as my ways lie in dark places, I am not taken with such methods; where women are concerned especially."

"Then you knew that my daughter was aboard with me?"

"I didn't know till this minute that the young lady was your daughter," said I. "But the inference that she was on the vessel was natural enough after I had chased you pretty well over Portland."

Stroth made no direct reply to this. He seemed rather to be settling some course. Then he shot out abruptly:

"What did Pawlinson tell you he was after my scalp for? Did he let you that far into his confidence?"

Now, it's no easy matter to tell a man of Stroth's type that he's a thief, and in spite of me I couldn't word Pawlinson's revelations into much softer phrase.

He noted my hesitation, but didn't spare me a whit.

"Come," Grey, out with it exactly! I want it all—and unvarnished!"

"Well," said I, bracing my voice with a swallow, "those affairs at certain country places along Long Island Sound have long been puzzling us, and——"

I might have spared myself my hesitation, for he didn't so much as turn a hair.

"Oh, so that was all, eh? Then he said nothing about——" He checked the sentence to another question: "What do you know about Pawlinson, anyway?"

"Precious little," I answered him, and I let my manner tell as much as it could of my contempt for the fellow. "In fact, I never heard of him till he came into prominence about three years ago at Washington. And that's about all any one in the service knows. He's understood to be something of a mystery."

Stroth grunted.

"I don't doubt it—I don't doubt it," said he, as to himself.

Then came another slight interval of silence, during which I puffed away contentedly at the panetela, for I felt no presentiment of coming trouble. In fact, I was beginning rather to enjoy the situation.

I knew men well enough to read in Stroth that he had not lost sight of the saving part I had played the night before; though, as I sat there looking at him, I confessed to myself he was a puzzle in some way—distinctly a puzzle.

He came out of his momentary abstraction with a shout of enthusiasm that was positively boyish:

"Then it's to be a little pleasure trip, after all! Good enough, Grey! And I believe you'll find that——"

Here I was fool enough to enter a wedge of curiosity:

"Then all that dope about this being the schooner that has been working the Sound is absolute bunkum, Mr. Stroth?"

It was as if I had touched a match to bomb.

His brow darkened, and he bit out:

"I believe I'm doing pretty well by you! But, of course, you have your choice—that is—pleasure trip—or otherwise. Understand me? Otherwise."

I hastened to shift.

"Nothing I like better than a sailing voyage, Mr. Stroth," and I let him know by my laugh that I realized he had me.

"I didn't think you were a fool," he replied, in lighter vein. "So here we have it, then, and it's the last word I want spoken on the subject. We're bound for Savannah, Georgia. Simple enough, eh? Till then you're my guest, we'll say. And, after we reach port, I'll have your word that you let three days go before you get the wires hot to headquarters. Now, take the proposition or leave it!"

"I understand at last, Mr. Stroth," said I slowly, "and my worst enemy can't say I'm not a man of my word."

As suddenly as he had left it he whirled back to boyishness.

"Fine—fine!" And he actually slapped me heartily on the shoulder. "By the way, what time is it?"

As if in answer, seven bells rang out.

"Good enough! There's plenty of time to show you something before dinner. And if you're interested in that sort of thing we'll certainly have an enjoyable trip!"

"Well, here, indeed, was a man of moods."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER.

By E. K. NOSTWELL.

My shanty was situated in the Bighorn Mountains, Wyoming. With the exception of two companions and some friendly trappers, who lived about five miles distant, I had not seen a white man for nearly a year.

One day I was out hunting with Anderson Picket. We had just sighted an antelope, and were occupied in stalking the animal, when we suddenly heard the neighing of a horse near us. Surprised at such an unusual sound in a neighborhood where very few human beings were to be encountered, we looked up and saw, hardly three hundred paces from us, a rider whose head was uncovered and his long hair floating in the wind that blew across the hills. He was a white-faced, haggard man, mounted on a thin horse.

For a few seconds he remained motionless, and then disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

"A highwayman," whispered Picket.

"What should a marauder be doing here?" I replied doubtfully, "for a distance of three or four hundred miles no one, with the exception of you, myself, and the trappers upon the creek, can be found. Not a single soul to hold up. Let us see who the fellow is."

Quickly mounting our horses and dropping our game for the time being, we galloped up the hill, following the stranger, who was slowly riding toward the north.

"That animal hasn't had much fodder or rest lately," laughed my companion. "I'll wager he hasn't ten pounds of flesh on his bones."

"I'd like to know who the man is, and what he is doing alone in these solitary hills," said I inquisitively. "Come, get a gait on the horse; let's get our game, and follow the fellow."

After acting upon the suggestion, we returned to our pursuit, and were hardly a hundred paces behind, when I shouted:

"Hello, my man! Where are you bound for?"

The horse turned its head toward us, but the rider did not move, and immediately started off at a breakneck gallop.

Although we were well mounted, and endeavored to follow him, he soon disappeared in a path thickly overgrown with brushwood. We consequently lost scent of the fugitive, and my companion very sensibly observed that we had better not follow him, as he might easily blow out our brains, under shelter of the rocks or hidden behind the brushwood, before we were aware of his presence.

We therefore retraced our steps toward our cabin, which we reached an hour later.

My second companion, who, in consequence of a slight wound, had remained at home, came toward us in great excitement.

"I'm glad you're back, boys!" he cried.

"Heavens, man! what has happened?" I asked anxiously.

He was as white as a corpse, and sighed as if relieved when we reached him.

"It was awful, I tell you, awful. In all my life I shall never forget what has happened to me."

"Come along; stop your quaking, and tell us what's wrong. Seen any suckers or a ghost?" said I smilingly, while Anderson asked impatiently:

"You've had a visit, haven't you? A highwayman on an old gray nag—"

"How do you know that?" stammered Jim, quickly interrupting him. "Some one was here, but it wasn't a road man, it was a ghost."

While he said this, he shivered from head to foot, and looked around anxiously on all sides.

"Don't be a fool," I laughed. "Tell us a straight story. What has happened to you?"

Meanwhile we had reached the cabin, and, as I sprang from the saddle, Jim pointed, with trembling hand, to the ground.

"Here, look at this; you can see the prints of the ghostly horse's hoofs," said he, in a voice full of excitement. "I was cleaning up things in the cabin, when I suddenly heard a noise outside. I thought you fellows had returned, and went out o'-doors to meet you. Horrified, I sprang back; before me, on a horse, nothing but skin and bones, was a man without a hat, with long black hair. He sat bolt upright in the saddle; he had a thick black beard; his face was ashen gray, and two eyes, wide open, stared at me in a ghastly way as only a specter's can. I wanted to, cry out, but my tongue seemed glued to my mouth—I felt my hair standing on end. Then the ghost turned his horse—started off at a gallop—I could plainly hear the rattling of the rider's and the horse's bones."

Jim shuddered again at the remembrance of the horrifying spectacle.

"That was the same fellow that we followed," cried Anderson; and I could only agree with him.

We then told Jim of our adventure, and quieted him by reasoning that it could not have been a ghost, but simply a human being, possibly some lunatic.

It was my custom, before going to bed, to look after the horses. I left the hut that evening as usual, but hardly had I taken a few steps when suddenly I stopped as though my feet were rooted to the ground.

Directly in front of me, in the bright moonlight, stood the same ghastly rider. His long black hair hung loosely round a ghastly face. The eyes were sunk deep in their sockets. The mouth was wide open, and the glimmer of the white teeth could be seen behind the black beard; in his left hand he held the reins, while the right hung limply by his side. He sat in the saddle as though hewn out of stone, without the slightest motion.

I had the same feeling as Jim. I wanted to cry out, but could not; only a hoarse whisper came from my throat, but instinctively my hand sought the revolver at my side. I slowly raised my six-shooter, and covered the frightful apparition. Then I found my voice.

"Who are you? Answer, or I'll shoot!" I said.

At the sound of my voice, the horse, which consisted of nothing but skin and bones, jumped to one side, and both horse and rider went off at a breakneck gallop, the bullets which I sent after them taking no effect. I distinctly heard the peculiar rattle of which Jim had spoken,

and which gradually grew dimmer and dimmer, until nothing could be distinguished but the far-off clatter of horse's hoofs on the rocky ground.

My heart was beating violently as I reëntered the hut.

Not one of us closed an eye that night. I tossed to and fro, in vain speculating what was to be done if the uncanny thing reappeared. When at last morning dawned, I resolved to ride over to the trappers at the creek and get their advice.

Soon after sunrise I started, and, after two hours' ride, saw the shanty of my friends some little distance off. They came to meet me with their guns in their hands, ready to shoot.

"Lucky for you that our eyes are accustomed to long range, and that the air is clear to-day, else either you or your horse would have a bullet between his bones now," said the elder of the two trappers, as I reached them, holding out his hand in friendly greeting.

"That's so," acquiesced the other, also shaking hands, but with a very solemn air. "Charlie is right. We were ready to shoot, but luckily saw our mistake in time."

"Since yesterday we have been on the watch. We've been fooled long enough, and mean to make an end to this infernal nonsense," said the first trapper.

"Has a singular-looking rider also paid you a visit?" I cried eagerly.

The friends looked at each other in astonishment.

"Do you know the beggar?" asked Jack quickly.

"I don't know him, but it is on his account that I'm here."

And I related our adventure, to which both listened attentively.

"No doubt it's the same fellow who got the best of us," said Charlie, shaking his head. "Day before yesterday we saw him for the first time. He took no notice of us, and seemed to be deaf to our shots. About noon he and his miserable old horse stood there, just opposite our shanty. 'Hello, what do you want?' I called out. No answer. A minute afterward he was gone. In the evening he drew rein up there on the hill again. As he wouldn't answer me, I lost patience, and got out my shooter, but before I could raise it, the fellow again disappeared. But I'm not going to be fooled to-day. I'll send a bullet through him, or his horse."

I willingly accepted the trappers' invitation to stay with them during the day. Our conversation turned almost exclusively on the mysterious stranger. In the afternoon I accompanied them to their traps, and while they were setting them I walked up and down with my gun in my hand. We had resolved as soon as the rider should reappear, to shoot his horse, and in that way get this singular creature into our hands.

The day was drawing to a close, and the peaks of the mountains were dyed in the sunlight.

"The fellow has a notion we're going for him," said Jack. "I shouldn't be sorry if he slipped by us now, for I'm hungry to see what sort of——"

He stopped suddenly, and the words seemed as if frozen to his lips as he stood staring at the rocks opposite the hut. There, on the top of the hills, clearly outlined against the red sky, was the ghostly rider. I also stood staring, spellbound, at the apparition. Then a shot rang out, and the horse fell forward.

"Come on, and don't let the fellow crawl from under and get out," cried Charlie, the smoking gun still in his hand, and pulling the revolvers from our belts we all scurried over the frozen creek that ran in front of the shanty, and up the declivity.

Jack was the first to reach the top. With one bound he stood next to the rider, who lay motionless on the quivering horse, of which he was still astride.

"Hold him!" yelled Charlie, with whom I was close on Jack's heels.

"It's not necessary," said Jack, bewildered, "for you've shot the beggar dead."

"Nonsense," said Charlie angrily. "I know exactly where my bullet hit. I aimed at the horse's left eye," he added. "There it is."

Meanwhile Jack was examining the rider closely.

"What is this?" he cried, astonished. "The fellow is bound fast to the horse—look here—even with a chain." Horrified, he sprang back. "Look, the man has a mark around his neck. Great Heaven, he's been hanging—he's been lashed to the horse, and the poor beast has been carrying around a lifeless burden."

Filled with astonishment and horror, we saw that Jack's suspicions admitted of no doubt. The rope had sunk deep into the man's muscular throat, and the knot was still attached to it.

Charlie then raised the dead man's head.

"Why, it's Black Sam!" he exclaimed. "He was a wild fellow, but he got his deserts. His gun was always ready, and he has sent many a good fellow to pass in his checks. Who knows how long it is that he has been astride this horse? Corpses do not decompose up here in the mountains, but dry up; I've often noticed that in dead animals."

Shuddering, he turned away. The dead man, with his withered face and staring eyes, had a truly horrifying appearance.

"What'll we do with him?" asked Jack, after a short pause.

Charlie considered a moment, then answered, while he unfastened the bands which tied the dead man to the dead horse:

"Lend a hand here, boys! It's our duty to give him a Christian burial. Let's push him in the gully."

In a few moments the dead man was released; Charlie took him by the shoulders, Jack and I by the legs, and so we carried him to the place indicated, and, by our united efforts, soon had a grave dug, in which he was laid. After this had been filled in, we rolled stones and small rocks over it to prevent the wolves from disturbing the dead.

It was night before we had finished our work. A solemn stillness reigned over all; no sound was to be heard, and, with uncovered heads, we uttered a short prayer.

"God be merciful to this poor sinner," added Charlie. Then we silently returned to the hut.

We retired that night earlier than usual, and even in my dreams the ghostly rider appeared to me. I awoke several times bathed in perspiration, disturbed by the loud howls piercing the stillness of the night. Wolves were eagerly fighting over the bones of the dead horse.

Next day I returned home, and related to my astonished friends the end of the mysterious rider.

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Want Shorter Course.

The Cornell faculty has directed the committee on student affairs to give serious consideration to the plan to cut down the length of the varsity race at the Hudson regatta from four to three miles, and has directed that committee to take the matter up with the stewards of the Intercollegiate Rowing Association.

The question of shortening this course was taken up seriously at a recent meeting of the faculty, and a considerable number of the professors expressed themselves as in favor of shortening the course. An agitation by Cornell to this end may be expected during the winter.

Calf With Eight Good Legs.

Willy Simpson, of Big Laurel, Va., owns a calf which has eight well-developed legs, the extra limbs being just behind the forelegs and just in front of the hind legs. The animal gets about splendidly on its extra walkers.

Exhibits of Ten Nations Arrive for the Fair.

Large consignments of foreign and domestic exhibits are arriving daily for the Panama Exposition, which will be opened promptly February 20, 1915. The latest consignments are:

Japanese shipment of 1,671 cases; 1,568 crates and cases from Canada; 126,000 pounds of exhibits from the Philippines; 110,000 pounds of materials from the Argentine.

Heavy shipments from England, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Italy are already on the grounds.

Two Prolific Apple Trees.

Frank Weber and John Trent, of Troy, Kan., picked from two trees twenty-seven barrels of apples. They were of the York Imperial variety. Trent's orchard is considered one of the most productive in that section.

Wireless Tit-for-tat Shots.

Europe's two principal wireless stations, the Eiffel Tower, at Paris, and the Nauen Tower, between Berlin and Hamburg, have been exchanging conversations.

The Nauen operator, discovering that the Eiffel was able to pick up his war messages ticked an indictment of Eiffel's news as flimsy and unreliable, to which the Eiffel rushed a long, rhyming retort, jeering the Germany army for its failure to reach Paris, and concluding:

"Despite your fine telegraphic victories, the Germans are slowly plunging into an abyss."

Oldfield Wins Desert Race.

Barney Oldfield, "master driver of the world," is the title the automobile speed king now is wearing.

Greeted by 15,000 cheering people, Oldfield drove in his car, a winner of the 671-mile Los Angeles-Phoenix road race.

Although led into the fair grounds seventeen minutes by Nikrent, Oldfield won first place and a cash prize of \$2,750 by thirty-six minutes elapsed time. Oldfield's elapsed time was 22 hours 59 minutes, and his average

was 29.1 miles per hour. Nikrent's time was 23 hours 35 minutes.

The 134 miles from Prescott, the second-night control, was driven in mud, and the drivers and cars were covered with a coat of clay.

Town Sells Jail at Auction.

Noank, Conn., is getting rid of some of its luxuries. The lockup and contents have been sold at auction and brought \$83.12.

The jail building, an unpretentious affair as compared with the Tombs in New York, was knocked down to Squadrito Brothers, of Mystic, for \$75, and two other bids took the jail stove and utensils for \$6.87. A quilt and mattress fetched \$1.25.

Schoolhouse Topples Over.

While the school at Sulphur Point, Fla., was being dismissed for recess, the building, which was built on high blocks, suddenly toppled over and went crashing to the ground, killing a cow that happened to be lying alongside of it. Fortunately none of the inmates were injured. A crowd gathered and succeeded in freeing the carcass of the cow by raising the building back into its place. Studies were resumed after the excitement died down, but some repairs have been made to the schoolhouse.

Old Gravestone is Replaced.

A century-old gravestone, made in 1814 to mark the graves of two victims of an Indian massacre near Alton, Ill., was brought to an Alton stonecutter to be repaired.

The stone, which commemorated the deaths of William and Joel Moore, July 10, 1814, had been split by the weather, and the parts will be cemented together. It was a rough sandstone slab, not smoothed, and the early-day pioneer had carved out an inscription in the sandstone with some crude tool. The letters are still legible.

A granite tablet has been placed on the site where the sandstone slab was found, and the slab has been taken as a relic by Irby Williams.

Propheesied His Long Sleep.

"I feel so tired that I believe I could sleep forever," remarked C. A. Kinkaid to a hotel clerk at Seattle, Wash., as he obtained his key and repaired to his room.

On the following afternoon Kinkaid was found dead. Death was due to asphyxiation, and evidently was accidental. One of the gas burners was partly open, but the window was up about six inches.

Kinkaid, who was a bridge carpenter, was a well-known member of the Eagles. He is survived by a wife, who left the city a few weeks ago to visit relatives in Lafayette, Ohio.

State Map Made from Seeds.

One of the unique agricultural exhibits that will be displayed at the Pan-American Exposition is a grain map of Kansas, made from twenty-eight varieties of field and garden seeds by J. C. Hastings, of Grantville, Kan. The grains and seeds are glued to a canvas, and the coloring

contained in the ordinary map of Kansas is carried out so far as possible with the various grains, so that the reproduction shows a splendid similarity. The size of the map is 48x88, and the grain on it weighs nineteen pounds.

Boy Helps Build Church.

Verne Hall, fifteen-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. George Hall, of Portland, Ore., is helping to build a church by soliciting bricks and hauling them to the site of the new St. John's edifice. In answer to his letter to Governor West, he received 500 bricks.

Hole Was Dug by Scientist.

The English newspapers recently made what they declared to be a startling discovery of extensive underground galleries at Tottenham, in the Chiltern Hills, which the Germans had dug, supposedly for some mysterious military purpose. The residents of the neighborhood even described the Germans and the mysterious way in which their excavations were conducted.

William M. Safford, whom the *Observer* describes as a distinguished American scholar, now writes to that newspaper declaring that he made the excavations. Mr. Safford says he discovered a cavern, which was nearly closed, and that his excavations in it disclosed carvings on stone dating 1613.

Quits Cattle for Turkeys.

Herding turkeys is a new way of making a living discovered by J. W. Abrams, of Springfield, Colorado. Abrams herds nearly a thousand turkeys through the Colorado alfalfa fields every year, letting the birds feed on grasshoppers. Two especially trained collie dogs assist in the work of herding. The ranchers are glad to have the pests which destroy their crops eaten from the fields, so Abrams and his outfit are welcome wherever they go.

An old cow pony, with a slicker, a shelter tent, and a cooking outfit packed on his back; two beautifully marked collies, and a thousand bronze turkeys, strutting and gobbling, make up the outfit. Abrams always herds within reaching distance of a stream, so his charges can get plenty of water.

When the turkey herder sold his flock last year at Thanksgiving time, the \$2,450 he received was almost clear profit. Abrams had 980 birds, averaging ten pounds apiece. He topped the market with his grasshopper-fed turkeys, receiving twenty-five cents a pound on the lot.

The only expense the birds had been to him was for oil to run his incubators, feed during the first six weeks of their lives, when they were too small to herd, rent on the ten-acre place where they were hatched, and the cost of raising a small field of spelt in which they ran to fatten after the fall frosts had killed the grasshoppers. Some turkey hens which he kept through the winter laid the eggs he set in the incubators.

"It isn't difficult to teach young turkeys to let dogs herd them," Abrams said. "They are rather timid at first. But Jeff and Mutt, here, have been trained never to frighten the birds. You'll notice they never bark at them, just growl a little and pretend to snap at their legs when they don't behave. Turkeys are stupid birds, you know. Every flock has a leader, who walks ahead. The others follow him blindly. I always keep an old gobbler from the year before for a leader. He is used to the dogs, and Jeff and Mutt manage the flock by guiding him."

The real work of the two dogs begins at dusk, when they herd the turkeys to the nearest shelter and keep them there until they settle for the night. When their master has cooked and eaten his supper and has rolled up in his blankets for his night's sleep, it is their duty to guard the flock from wandering skunks, stray coyotes, cats, and other animals who are fond of young turkey. By dawn the old gobbler is stirring, eager for a breakfast of bugs and grasshoppers.

Abrams was a cowboy before he started herding turkeys, about five years ago.

"The range was all fenced in Colorado," he said, "and it was up to me to find some other job besides running cattle."

"Big May," Circus Lady, Dead.

Christiana Sinclair, who traveled with circus side shows as "Big May, the tattooed woman," is dead at her home at Baltimore, Md. She weighed three hundred pounds.

Eyewitnesses Tell How "Audacious" Sank.

According to witnesses of the sinking of the great British dreadnaught *Audacious*, off the coast of Ireland, there was only one fatality. Naval men in New York unite in praise of the work of the crew of the steamship *Olympic*, in effecting the rescue of nearly nine hundred men of the sea fighter's crew. All those not taken off by the *Olympic* were rescued by the British cruiser *Liverpool*.

Whether the *Audacious* is still at the bottom of the sea or is being repaired by the British admiralty and may again see service is now the only mystery connected with reports of the vessel of the first line of England's naval defense falling victim to a German mine or torpedo. It is the general opinion that the *Audacious* struck a mine.

Two men who arrived in New York on the steamship *New York*, from *Liverpool*, confirmed the stories of the loss of the warship that had previously reached here, and added numerous details. One statement they made was that the *Audacious* was blown up by the cruiser *Liverpool* at nine p. m. on the day it was disabled. This has not been confirmed.

The men who told the story were James Rupert Beames, leader of the orchestra on the White Star liner *Olympic*, which rescued the crew of the *Audacious* and made fruitless efforts to tow the battleship to shoal water, and Hugh Griffiths, one of the orchestra musicians.

The story of Beames, who was helped from time to time by Griffiths, substantially was as follows:

"Neither the *Liverpool* nor the other small warship that had steamed to the work of rescue was capable of saving the superdreadnaught.

"It was decided that the *Liverpool* could better risk hitting a mine than could the *Olympic*, and for this reason the *Liverpool* made a serpentine maneuver ahead of the *Olympic* as a feeler for mines.

"Hardly had the *Liverpool* cut across our bow when the order was given to man the starboard lifeboats. Before this a call had been issued for volunteers.

"More answered than the boats could accommodate, and when it came time for action the *Olympic's* crew actually fought to get into the boats, so eager were they to do something for their country and for the sailors on the doomed *Audacious*. When one of the boats hit the water they found in it a little bell boy, eleven years old, who carried messages to and from the purser's office.

"Although the starboard lifeboats were manned, Captain Haddock suddenly changed his plan.

"Instead of dropping down on the port side of the pounding warrior, he decided to put about and approach on the starboard side. By so doing he made a lee, which enabled the fourteen lifeboats dropped from the port side to accomplish a task that never could have been done if the original plan had been put into effect.

"The seas were high, and the men in the *Olympic's* lifeboats had a hard pull. It took them twenty minutes to get over to the *Audacious*, which lay about five hundred yards away. We could see the crew at quarters. They were the calmest body of men I ever have seen. The discipline was perfect. Through the binoculars the captain of the *Audacious* was seen walking up and down the deck calmly, with his hands behind his back. The rescue work proceeded rapidly, and there was but one fatality.

"The *Olympic* dropped anchor off Lough Swilly at eight p. m. An hour later a tremendous flash lighted up the entire ship. We rushed to the deck and could see, for fully twenty seconds afterward, burning fragments shooting upward from the place where the *Audacious* had been. Then there came a roar. It sounded, they said, as if some mammoth boiler were letting off steam. It stopped as suddenly as it came. That was the end of the *Audacious*.

"As a reason for destroying the *Audacious* it was said that the battleship was hopelessly damaged, and that if not blown up it would become a menace to navigation."

Seek Brave Man to Ring Haunted Bell.

At midnight Christmas Eve the ringing tones of "Big Sam," the haunted bell, as it is called at Richmond, Va., will be heard for the first time from the tower of the new armory. Chief W. H. Thompson, of the fire-and-police-signal system, makes this announcement, but he does so with a hesitancy that frequently brings this question:

"Are you sure?"

"As reasonably sure as any one may be about anything in connection with the haunted bell," said Chief Thompson, still with an air of mystery and as if evading a direct reply. "That bell has been silent almost from the time it was brought to this city twenty-three years ago, and they say it is haunted."

"So I've heard," ventured the scribe, "but what about it?"

"It has had a baleful influence upon everything connected with it. All who had a hand in bringing it here are dead."

"Good gracious! What more?"

"It is the biggest bell in the city. It weighs four thousand pounds. It was presented to the Grace Street Presbyterian Church by David Sinton in 1891. We called it 'Big Sam,' and the first time he spoke he shook the tower so hard all feared it would come down. The vibrations were so great that it was decided not to ring it again, and, being useless, an effort was made to sell it. The city bought it for the Blues armory in November, 1909, but the acoustics there made it impossible to operate the striker, and finally it was transferred to the new First Regiment Armory and installed in the tower."

"Well, how about this midnight business on Christmas Eve? I would like to know," said the scribe, "because it may be that I won't be here."

"I was directed to make the necessary connections so that it will strike the hours, both day and night, and auto-

matically strike all alarms of fire, military, and special calls. It should be ready to strike the midnight hour Christmas Eve."

"Will you have the honor of starting the apparatus that strikes the first call?" Chief Thompson was asked.

"No," he replied quietly. "I told you that every one connected with the haunted bell is dead. I shall sublet the contract of making the connections. Now, possibly you, being a newspaper man and one used to dangers, will—"

"No, sir; I positively will not! Good night!"

Serenade for Newlyweds.

William Munn was married at Corry, Pa., on a recent evening, and while the wedding supper was in progress a party of serenaders arrived. To make the affair interesting, Munn's friends set off several sticks of dynamite. The charge shattered every window in the house, and the bride and groom and several of the guests were hurled from the chairs upon which they were sitting. To avoid arrest, the serenaders paid all of the damages.

Strange Animal in His Trap.

Jerome Redmond, known all over the Northwest for his skill in trapping, recently captured a strange animal in Lake Sixteen, Cheboygan County, Michigan. It resembles an otter, only its body is more like a serpent. It has two front legs, and its tail is shaped like that of a fish. Running the full length of its back is a ridge with teeth like a saw's. Redmond has been offered one hundred dollars for it by the local taxidermist, but refused the offer. The animal measures eight inches from tip to tip.

Bars Whipping from School.

Corporal punishment has been abolished in the public schools at St. Louis, Mo., except for extraordinary cases, as a result of the petition of George E. Dieckman, chairman of the humane society executive committee, who maintained that St. Louis was the only one of the big, progressive cities in which this "brutal and ineffective punishment" was preserved.

The new regulation adopted by the board of education provides that corporal punishment may be administered only in incorrigible cases, with the consent of the parent, and in the presence of the principal. A thin rattan is to be used. Slapping, shaking, and boxing the child's ears are all absolutely prohibited.

Daylight Bandits Get \$25,000 in "Swag."

The most daring robbery that has been perpetrated in Chicago in many months, in which a jeweler, his clerk, and two other men were seized in broad daylight, bound hand and foot with rope, held prisoners, and menaced with revolvers, while gunmen robbed the safe of \$25,000 in jewelry and money, occurred recently.

The scene of the robbery was the North Avenue loan bank and jewelry store, 517 West North Avenue, founded six years ago by Max Klein and Max Spear. An important part of the business is loaning money on jewelry, and all the valuable pieces were in a safe in the rear of the store, which was looted. The four men who were seized, bound, and held prisoners while the men packed the loot in a suit case and got away were Max Spear, partner and manager; George Kaeker, clerk; Charles A. White, customer, who entered while the robbers were at work, and

Frank Dallas, a saloon keeper, who came in to get change for a twenty-dollar bill.

All four victims remained bound hand and foot in the little rear office for forty minutes while the money, watches, rings, bracelets, necklaces, and other jewelry were taken from the safe by one of the men, while the other robber kept a gun close to their heads. They saw every detail of the robbery, and finally watched the robbers depart.

Says 150 Hens Equal Six Bales of Cotton.

"One hundred and fifty hens equal six bales of cotton," is the economical equation demonstrated by George Echols, a farmer, of Brazos County, Texas.

Echols has a flock of 150 hens. He has sold, this year, \$200 worth of eggs. Reckoning sales for the next two months, and adding sales of live poultry, making due allowance for eggs and poultry used by his family, Echols figures he will clear \$300 on his flock.

Echols has a tenant who pays him \$140 for the use of his farm land. The tenant's crop this season is six bales of cotton, worth but \$40 more than his rent. Under normal conditions the cotton would not net more than \$360. The cotton required most of the tenant's time since April and the feed of a team.

Echols says his wife devoted only about one hour a day to the hens. Counting the equipment of team and implements for growing cotton, and contrasting the investment in chickens and poultry houses, Echols declares the gross figures prove 150 hens are equal to six bales of cotton.

Egg-laying Contest Closed.

The third international egg-laying test, held at Storrs, Conn., is concluded, and every poultryman should be interested in the few following facts:

1—Of the five leading pens, three were from New England.

2—The leading pen is owned by Francis F. Lincoln, of Mount Carmel, Conn.

3—The leading pen—White Leghorns—laid 2,088 eggs.

4—Tom Barron's White Wyandottes finished second, with 2,085 eggs.

5—The average production per hen is 144 eggs.

6—The highest individual record, 265 eggs, was made by a White Wyandotte, owned by Merrythought Farm, Columbia, Conn.

Rabbit-killing Boy Released from Jail.

Oscar Phillipson, of Plainfield, N. J., the nineteen-year-old boy who was recently sentenced to the county jail for 120 days for shooting a rabbit, is at liberty on bail pending an appeal. Former Mayor N. B. Smalley put up the \$250 bail.

Ernest Napier, president of the State game commission, and William Hoblitzel, game warden for Union, County, conferred with Mr. Angleman, the boy's lawyer, and an appeal was decided upon. Justice of the Peace Thomas Snape, who sentenced Phillipson, accepted Mr. Smalley's bond and Mr. Napier paid the \$9 costs himself. They then went to Somerville and brought Phillipson home in an automobile.

Young Phillipson has declined a number of offers from men who want to pay his fine. He has declined because he doesn't want half of the fine to go to the man who informed against him.

Mr. Napier upheld Justice Snape as well as Game Warden Hoblitzel in the action taken over the violation of the game laws. At the same time he said he was willing to do all in his power to relieve the present situation, which has aroused so much public sentiment.

There is a feeling that the case will not be argued on appeal. Governor Fielder himself suggested an appeal as a means of getting the boy out of jail in the event that the court of pardons, consisting of the governor, the chancellor, and six members of the court of errors and appeals, should not look favorably upon a pardon.

The governor has directed his secretary, L. Edward Herrmann, to make an investigation of the whole case in preparation for the meeting of the court of pardons. Governor Fielder said it seemed to him that some plan might be devised whereby the exaction of the maximum penalty might be avoided where the circumstances seemed to warrant.

Newsboy Becomes Diaryman.

With nickels and pennies made after school hours and on Saturday selling newspapers, Noble McKillip, thirteen years old, of Fort Worth, Texas, has been paying for school books for himself and his eleven-year-old sister, Goodie, and also car fare for both, and in addition clothed himself and put so much in the bank each day. He has now set himself up in the dairy business with his newspaper earnings. He drew his savings out of the bank and paid for the cow, a four-gallon Jersey.

Noble is a student in the Vickery school. Selling papers did not interfere with his studies, and he is progressing rapidly in them and expects to go through the higher branches.

De Oro's Mark to Stand a Long Time.

Alfredo de Oro, the world's champion at three-cushion billiards, has experienced the thrills of victory in many hard-fought matches, but it is doubtful if any of his performances afford him greater satisfaction than his world's record run of 13, made in his match with George Moore, for the three-cushion title, at New York, recently.

Previous to this, the best mark of the veteran Cuban in a title match was ten, but now that he hoisted the mark three points, it may stand for a long time. The present season has been productive of some phenomenal performances at the angle game. Early in the season, Pierre Maupome, the Mexican expert, ran eighteen in a practicing game at St. Louis, and a little later August Kieckhefer, champion of the Interstate Three-cushion League, made a run of seventeen points in a game at Milwaukee.

Quite as remarkable as these two big runs was the performance of Harry Wakefield, one of San Francisco's leading experts, who in a game against a coast amateur scored fifty points in twenty-two innings. Wakefield started with 5, 5, 2, 5, and then electrified the crowd with a run of fifteen on his next trial, giving him thirty-two points in five innings. He made forty-six points in sixteen innings, and in the seventeenth inning scored three, missing his fiftieth point by a whisker. His opponent played five safety shots in succession, so that it took Wakefield five more innings to count his remaining point. Among those who saw the performance were Joe Carney, former three-cushion national champion, and W. H. Sigourney, the well-known ball-line amateur.

With the big Interstate Three-cushion League affording

the sixteen contestants every incentive to practice, some great performances can be looked for.

This prediction also applies to the balkline stars playing in the Champion Billiard Players League and to those who are not. The contestants around the big circuit are getting more billiards this year than any set of players have enjoyed in the history of the game in this country.

Too Heavy for Hikes of War.

Rudolph Berger, who is a well-known operatic baritone singer, and who is six feet five inches tall and tips the beam at 240 pounds, has arrived at New York from Naples after serving three weeks in the Austrian army. He took part in long marches. The Austrians started for Lemberg, but Berger never got there. He was overweight, and after a while his feet refused to carry him. He was allowed to abandon his military career. He says he will become an American citizen.

New Fluid to Take Place of Gasoline.

John Andrus, a Portuguese, came to this country to make his fortune. He has become an inventor. Recently the government paid him thirty thousand dollars for a discovery he made in toughening armor plate. A much more important discovery, however, has been made by Andrus. He is working on a substitute for gasoline that can be manufactured, he says, for one and one-half cents a gallon.

According to some of the biggest men in the automobile business, who have observed tests of the new fuel, it will revolutionize not only the automobile business, but all manufacturing business. The substitute is declared to be superior to gasoline in more respects than cost. It is claimed that it runs automobiles faster and that when it is used the engines are cleaner and cooler.

Andrus has a good business head, and has interested influential men in his plans. No stock is for sale, but the automobile men are talking about the discovery as the most important news in their industry. They say that the new fluid consists mostly of water, a little naphthalene, and two secret ingredients. Andrus mixes these in a still to which heat is applied. The fluid looks like water and smells like camphor balls.

Says His Rifle Fires 200 Shots a Minute.

A one-man gun, invented by a Rochester man, and guaranteed by him to increase a soldier's fighting efficiency twenty or thirty times, is for sale. Its inventor, Harry W. Sweeting, says he has begun negotiations with Germany for the sale of the invention, which he has protected by American patents. Mr. Sweeting is now in New York on his way to Washington. At the Park Avenue Hotel he admitted that he was trying to sell the gun to Germany, but hinted that there was some probability of negotiations with this government.

The new gun weighs only nine pounds, half a pound more than the present standard rifle. It will fire from 165 to 200 shots a minute, Mr. Sweeting said, ninety shots consecutively without being taken from the shoulder. He says the velocity is 2,700 feet a second.

"By holding the trigger back," Mr. Sweeting said, "ninety shots are fired. The ejector is on the under side. The sight is only three inches from the eye, giving a quicker and more accurate aim than in the present rifles,

in some of which the sight is thirteen inches from the eye.

"My gun has only one-third as many working parts as the present rifle. There is not a flat spring in the gun, and all the parts are inclosed, which protects them from the weather. It has safety locks which make it impossible to fire after the gun misses fire, and a self-cleaning device. Give me the gun to bring down a man a mile away who is six feet from a tree and I will get him before he gets to the tree. If I should fail, I can shoot him through the tree, if it is not more than eighteen inches in diameter."

The inventor has been working on the invention for more than a year. His thirty-eight pages of specifications are registered with the Patent Office.

Dollar a Year is His Salary.

At a salary of one dollar a year, Frederick W. M. Burmeister has been appointed custodian of the cut-off channel front and rear-range lights in the Patapsco River, near Baltimore, Md.

Custodian Burmeister has but few duties to perform. In addition to his salary, he has the free use of a home on the lighthouse reservation. He could not be carried on the government pay rolls without a specified salary, and to give official importance and responsibility the salary of one dollar was agreed upon.

It was not stated whether he would be paid monthly, as is the department's custom, or let it accrue to the end of the year.

Big Eagle Drops Baby.

About two weeks ago a posse of farmers scoured Will County, Illinois, for two huge eagles, which were killing hundreds of chickens and young turkeys. One of the pair was killed. The other disappeared, and the hunters finally abandoned the hunt.

On a recent morning, Delmer Reeves, the two-year-old son of David Reeves, was playing in the back yard of the Reeves home. His mother heard the child scream and rushed to the door in time to see an enormous bird clutch the baby by his dress and lift him from the ground.

The mother screamed, and the eagle dropped the child after the baby had been carried a few feet. The eagle's talons badly lacerated the child's flesh. Members of the farmers' posse have resumed their hunt for the dangerous visitor.

"Wild Man" Was Only Ill.

Women and girls of Port Jefferson, L. I., who had been frightened frequently in the last few months by the appearance in deserted stretches of road near the town of a "wild man," learned with relief recently that Constable Harry Gover had caught the man. Their fears changed to sympathy when they learned the wild man's story, and his capture probably will result in his getting assistance.

He said his name was Juan Rodriguez, and that he had come from Monterey, Mexico, ten years ago. He was sent to a hospital in New York some time ago, and eight months back was discharged as cured. It was spring then, and he walked out into the country looking for work.

His strength has been sapped by his long illness, he said, and at last he found himself too weak to work. Then

he took to the woods, subsisting on what he could beg at first, and then, as his clothes became mere tatters and his appearance began to frighten strangers, on what he could find in the woods.

He said he had never accosted a woman or a girl, though he realized many had seen him and had run, and he said he had frequently spent the night in trees while he listened to farmers beating the woods around him for traces of him after their wives or daughters had seen the wild man.

He was fed, and decent clothes were given to him.

Three Boys Travel Far in Piano Box.

The trucker wheeled the heavy piano box into the Erie freight house, at Fourteenth and Clark Streets, Chicago, and dumped it on the floor.

"That's some box!" he complained.

"You bet it is!"

The words came from the mouth of a youth whose grinning head stuck out from the top of the box. The trucker fell over his truck and ran yelling into the night. Attracted by the noise, the night watchman, William Schimmel, came into the freight house.

"Hey!" shouted the boy. "Can I get some water?"

Schimmel questioned the head.

"I'm Willard Montague, snake charmer," it said. "Got two pythons and their baby here. Get me some water for myself and some cocaine for the snakes."

Mr. Schimmel left the freight house in a great hurry. He described what he had seen and heard to C. D. Ward, general agent; A. C. Brundage, claim agent; Policeman Toussaint, and Detectives Zohora and Jansen. Ward called up James Burke, superintendent of the Chicago terminal division of the Erie, who came down in his auto. The crowd grouped itself around the box, which was marked, "Don't Stand on End," and signaled for the young man inside to stick his head through the trap. Montague, grinning, complied.

Burke asked to see the snakes.

"They're wrapped up in those comforters," said Montague. "I don't like to disturb 'em. Besides, I couldn't get out of here in time."

Burke insisted. Montague made a dive at the comforters, whistled through his teeth, and drew his hand out sharply.

"One of 'em kinda catch you?" prompted Burke.

"Yeah," said Monty, sucking his thumb; "the big one sorta got me."

"How big are they?"

"One's 'bout eleven feet long. Ugly. Haven't been fed. Been keeping them asleep with 'coke.' Just run out of the dope."

"Well, let me see their scales," Burke insisted.

Two electric lights were rigged up and held in the opening so that Burke and others might have a glimpse of the interior of the box.

Monty was stirring up the blankets as though some monstrous reptile were there.

"Come, come!" said Burke. "If you don't pull that comforter off that boa constrictor I will."

Then the covering was yanked off and the men on top of the box looked directly into the cherubic face of another grinning boy. Simultaneously another heap of cov-

ers back of Montague was thrown off and a third head revealed.

"Those are the pythons, are they?"

"Yes, those are the snakes."

"Well, now, suppose you come out here and tell us the story."

One at a time the boys wriggled through the trapdoor and came, blinking out, to face the audience. Each was bathed in perspiration and all were in stocking feet.

A reporter took their names: Willard Fox, 18 years old; Howillard Edward Montague, 22 years old, and Carl Espe, 17 years old. All were from Binghamton, N. Y.

They had been disguised as a piano box for seven days, and were on their way to Alameda, Cal., to the ranch of Montague's uncle, Doctor William Tappan Lumb. They chose to go as a piano box because it was cheaper than three passenger tickets.

The box was built by a carpenter in Binghamton. It had a false bottom and the sides were padded. The boys put stones in the bottom, and also their suit cases.

"We expected to be on the way about three weeks," said Monty, who seemed to be the leader of the expedition. "We took along canned goods, bread and cereals, coffee and tobacco."

"We had a phonograph and records, but it is broken. We had also arranged to have light. We had some electric batteries in the false bottom which connected with a bulb, but the bulb broke."

"There was also a stove and alcohol to run it. We have shoes, coats, sweaters, hats, and, in fact, all our possessions."

They even had a framed certificate on the wall—Montague's diploma from the "Boan Lake, Mich., College of Manopathy."

"We didn't have much sleep, and we got bumped around some," said Fox, "but, say, wasn't it a peach of an adventure? My parents live in Wiegol, N. Y., and Monty and Espe haven't any."

"The boys have violated a Federal interstate law," said Mr. Burke, "but I don't know what action the road will take. We shall probably take steps against the shipper and the man who was to receive them at the other end. The fare was to be paid in Alameda."

Officer Toussaint questioned the travelers, then turned them over to the South Clark Street police. He could not say definitely what would be done with them.

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